CONFLICTS OVER ACCESS TO SEA SPACE ARE INCREASING AS THE GLOBAL EXPLOITATION OF MARINE RESOURCES IS INTENSIFIED.

This is a story of a struggle over sea space among small-scale fishers and oil companies in the Mexican Gulf of Mexico. It aims to construct a critical understanding of contemporary modes of oil governance and related struggles over fishers' identity and subsistence during the contemporary global intensification of oil extraction.

Since 2003, the Mexican government has cordoned off from fishers 15,900 km^2 of the Gulf of Mexico's important offshore oil production area, purportedly to protect the oil industry from 'potential terrorist threats'. Restrictions on fishers' offshore movement have decreased fish catches and forced many fishers to defy the bans and continue fishing in the prohibited areas in order to secure their living.

The thesis follows fishers' political and seafaring practices in Mexico's oil production areas, thereby bringing offshore oil and fish extraction into analytical focus as an important space of everyday sociality and politics. The study is based on ethnographic fieldwork and media analysis.

While neoliberal modes of environmental governance – including the privatization of industries and the shifting of the state's responsibility for resource exclusion to local populations – have become common in rendering offshore oil exploitable, this study shows that they are intimately intertwined with historical narratives and practices, and local social hierarchies. Meanwhile, the fishers' affective relations with aquatic spaces, and their related environmental knowledge, transcend formal arenas of politics as they are not fully articulable into narratives of political claims. The study further shows how fisher leaders operate as political mediators, moving between the worlds of oil politics, seafaring, and the media, transforming embodied claims over identity into narratives that are recognizable and acceptable within arenas of extractive politics. The study has relevance for both theoretical and policy-oriented efforts to understand the politics of changing maritime worlds.

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CONTESTED SEA LIINA-MAIJA QUIST

CONTESTED SEA

THE POLITICS OF SPACE, SEAFARING AND EXTRACTION AMONG FISHERS AND THE OIL INDUSTRY IN MEXICO

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LIINA-MAIJA QUIST

PHD DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

This is a study of the everyday politics of marine resource access among small scale fishers and oil companies in Tabasco, in the Mexican Gulf of Mexico. It is an analysis of a prolonged environmental conflict over sea space, identity and livelihoods during the contemporary global intensification of oil extraction. Since 2003, the Mexican government has cordoned off 15,900 km^2 of the Gulf of Mexico's important offshore oil production area, purportedly to protect the oil industry from 'potential terrorist threats'. The oil industry's expansion has decreased fish catches and forced many fishers to defy the bans on offshore movement and continue fishing in the prohibited areas in order to secure their living. By following fishers, fishers' political leaders, and government and oil industry actors in the everyday spaces of politics and fishing, this study examines contested claims over livelihoods, environmental knowledge, and a way of life. Through ethnographic and media analysis of what is said and done to defend rights to the marine environment, it aims to construct a critical understanding of contemporary modes of oil governance and related struggles over fishers' identity in Southeastern Mexico. It seeks to show the complex ways in which power operates in offshore environmental governance, and those aspects of the fishers' seafaring way of life which remain beyond conventional arenas of everyday politics.

The study's methodology and results provide tools for analyzing urgent global environmental-social challenges related to intensified marine resource extraction. In the current situation, small scale fishing continues to be highly important for both food security and employment in the Global South, while oil extraction is being expanded into new areas, regardless of international recognition of its various harmful impacts. In political ecology, however, the relations between extractive politics and local livelihoods in marine environments have received relatively scarce attention. The thesis follows fishers' political and seafaring practices in Mexico's oil production areas, thereby bringing offshore oil and fish extraction into analytical focus as an important space of everyday sociality and politics. It seeks to open the field of political ecology further to offshore oil's complex knowledge/power configurations and maritime lifeworlds. Additionally, it asks what an ethnographic approach provides to the study of offshore extractive politics within processes of social and economic change, which in Mexico are related to the oil industry's privatization and operational expansion. The research is based on 6.5 months of ethnographic fieldwork in coastal Tabasco and Tabasco's capital Villahermosa in 2011, 2012, and 2017, as well as newspaper analysis.

The urgent demand to examine alternatives to current environmental politics also involves a theoretical challenge to rethink the politics of those who are often described as subaltern. Ethnographic analysis of sea-based sociality and politics makes a contribution to this end. This study examines how power operates between the state, the oil industry, the media, and the fishers in conflicts over sea space; and how sea-based lifeworlds, fundamentally different from onshore living, are dis/articulated in fisher narratives and practices expressing rights to the sea. It connects post-foucauldian discussions of oil's governmentality to STS-oriented anthropological and geographic conceptualizations of radical alterity. The study also draws on the creative intersection of debates in maritime studies and development studies about sustainable livelihoods. It suggests that discussions about alterity and environmental politics could be enriched through attention to marginal spaces of difference within maritime worlds.

While neoliberal modes of environmental governance – including the privatization of industries and the shifting of the state's responsibility for resource exclusion to local populations – have become common in rendering offshore oil exploitable, this study shows that they are intimately intertwined with historical narratives and practices, and local social hierarchies. In Mexico, oil's governmentality draws on a fuzzy ensemble of authoritarian and market-based techniques that work to displace the fishers from sea space and from politics, constituting the sea as a sacrifice zone where environmental harm is externalized. Furthermore, a symbolically powerful, popular template of oil as patrimony informs local narratives, especially those of local communication media, undermining embodied claims for identity made by practicing fishers. Indeed, the fishers' affective relations with aquatic spaces, and their related environmental knowledge, conceptualized as radical alterity, transcend both the media and formal arenas of politics as they are not fully articulable into narratives of political claims. In the less visible political spaces on- and offshore, fishers seek to sustain rhizomatic networks on which they draw to endure and escape the constraints of resource regulations. The study further shows how fisher leaders operate as political mediators, moving between the worlds of oil politics, seafaring, and the media, transforming embodied claims over identity into narratives that are recognizable and acceptable within hierarchical arenas of extractive politics. This has relevance for both theoretical and policy-oriented efforts to understand the politics of changing maritime worlds.

Key words: difference, environmental conflict, ethnography, fisher, fishing, governmentality, knowledge, media, narrative, oil industry, patrimony, politics, political leader, sacrifice zone, sea, seafaring, space

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< Photo 1.1 A Tabascan nightfishing *cintilla* (cutlass fish) by the coast

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Acronyms

ASEA	Agencia de Seguridad, Energía y Ambiente
DO	Diario Oficial
DOF	Diario Oficial de la Federación
EPN	Enrique Peña Nieto
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FIFOPESCA	Fideicomiso del Fondo de Reconversión Pesquera
CONAPESCA	Comisión Nacional de Pesca
CRIP	Centro Regional de Investigación Pesquera
INAPESCA	Instituto Nacional de Pesca
INEGI	Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía
NGO	Non-governmental organization
PEMEX	Petróleos Mexicanos
PAN	Partido de Acción Nacional
PRD	Partido Revolucionario Democrático
PRI	Partido Revolucionario Institucional
PROFEPA	Procuraduría Federal de Protección al Ambiente
SAGARPA	Secretaría de Agricultura, Ganadería, Desarrollo Rural, Pesca y Alimentación
SEGOB	Secretaría de Gobernación
SEMAR	Secretaría de Marina
SEMARNAT	Secretaría de Medioambiente y Recursos Naturales
SERNAPAM	Secretaría de Energía, Recursos Naturales y Protección Ambiental
STS	Science and Technology Studies
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
US	United States
US EIA	United States Energy Infromation Administration

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

1.1 SETTING THE SCENE

In 2011, I sat together with seven fisher leaders and two oil company representatives in a meeting in Tabasco, on the Gulf coast of southeastern Mexico. The topic of discussion was compensation for displaced fishers arising from the oil industry's occupation of Tabasco's coastal fishing areas. The atmosphere in the meeting was tense because all the fisher leaders knew that the compensation, which mostly involved new motors and fishing nets, was ridiculously small. According to the leaders, seismic studies carried out to track potential oil deposits were displacing both fish and fishers from traditional fishing grounds and undermining an age-old way of life. Yet the meeting was a performance of moves which everybody knew beforehand. One of the leaders aggressively laid on the table that day's local newspaper article about the impacts of the latest oil spill in coastal Tabasco. Another leader shouted at the oil company men, who tried to remain calm and note the fisher leaders' preferences for models of boat motors. Assuming the role of frustrated victims through this ritual expression of anger allowed the fisher leaders to exert a degree of moral pressure on the oil companies regarding the type of compensation. However, neither the meeting nor the newspaper testimony brought the ocean as the fishers' lifeworld into the political realm. In other words, the meanings of being a fisher remained beyond articulation into an acceptable language of claims.

Meanwhile, in their daily travels across aquatic spaces, practicing fishers produced and expressed their intimate, embodied relations with the sea. For Tabasco fishers, as for their fathers and grandfathers, the river delta and the sea outside the states of Tabasco and Campeche were *"la zona de los pescadores"*, their zone. In everyday talk, the men construed themselves as part of the waterscape. Yet, when an elderly fisher told me that to be a good fisher, *"tiene que gustarle el agua"* (you have to like water), I needed to dig deeper into the meanings of this affection, which I recognized in myself, but which certainly did not make me a good fisher. The more I followed different fishers in their seafaring activities, the better I understood that their intimacy with the sea environment could not be fully captured in words. Furthermore, I understood the distance between the fishers' way of life, characterized by different degrees of sweat, boredom, excitement and freedom, and the world of everyday oil governance where fishers were primarily considered a nuisance that stood in the way of development.

This thesis examines a prolonged dispute between fishers and the oil industry over access to large offshore areas in Tabasco in the Gulf of Mexico. In 2003, an area of 15,900 km^2 in the Gulf was closed off by the government from fishers, with the narrative of protecting the oil industry from 'potential acts of terrorism'. While the Mexican government and the oil industry blame fishers for breaching the security restrictions and for overexploiting fish, fishers say that increased seismic explorations and oil spills displace and kill fish, threatening fishers' way of life. The focus of research is on the ways fishers, fisher leaders and oil industry actors make everyday claims over sea space, livelihood, seafaring identity and legitimate environmental knowledge. The recent (2014) privatization of the oil industry and its concurrent, large-scale operational expansion in the Gulf of Mexico frames the practical and political context of the conflict in question.

During my fieldwork in Tabasco in 2011–2012 and 2017, I lived for three months with a family headed by a local fisher, whom I call Álvaro, who has long been a political leader of Tabasco's sea fishers. Álvaro's role in the conflict was difficult, because he operated as a mediator between the demands of thousands of internally divided fishers and the multiple pressures of the oil industry. In this setup, Álvaro invited me to live with his family. However, examining Álvaro's role in the tense politics during residence in the family's intimate sphere made fieldwork difficult. In the beginning, both I and Álvaro had a hard time trying to figure out what the other's 'real' agenda was. It seemed to me that Álvaro was engaged in a multitude of hidden deals with the oil industry, and I was at a loss in trying to relate to his ambiguous role. It was also difficult, I think, for Álvaro, to trust that my research objectives were purely scientific, and to deal with the highly unusual arrangement of my staying in his house. To complicate matters further, at the beginning of fieldwork, I realized I was measuring Álvaro according to my own, liberal democratic ideals about radical political leaders and 'resistance'.

A considerable part of my perspective on the fishers' lifeworlds and politics arose from my attempt to come to terms with Álvaro's position, to understand what he sought to defend and what concessions he made. In this thesis, I examine him as a mediator in politics, but also as a mediator between the different and highly unequal 'worlds' of the fishers and governmental and oil industry actors. The research focus developed through the dynamics evolving from my staying in Álvaro's home and my participation in the fishers' movements in the aquatic spaces around his home town and in the wider political venues of Tabasco. From the beginning, these spaces – the mobile lifeworlds of fishing, the arenas of political organization and the sphere of family – appeared as distinct worlds. The differences between them drew my attention to the diverse phenomenological aspects of social life therein, and to their power hierarchies and the differentiated access to them. As I came to realize that it was the sea that inspired Álvaro's politics, I found myself with theorizations grounded in the work of Deleuze and Latour, which provided me with ways to examine the fishers' intimacy with the sea environment, and the complex relations between this and everyday politics; indeed, the sea environment was accorded different meanings within the 'worlds' of fishing and politics. Furthermore, identifying how these different worlds relat-

ed to difference and hierarchy among fishers also became a lens onto the oil industry's divide-and-rule politics.

Guadalupe[1], a small, quiet port town on a river a few kilometers from Tabasco's coast, is embraced by water on nearly all sides. A historical port with a lively past that still serves part of the current offshore oil and fisheries industries in Tabasco, its ambience has a transitory character. For centuries, things and people have moved through the town on their way from and across the sea. For fishers, fish entrepreneurs, their political leaders and the oil industry, the nowadays quieter town is also a home or a transitory space but not a place of work, as most of the action happens by the water or in government and oil industry offices beyond the city center. Those were the places where I also sought to be.

Peaceful Guadalupe, however – not its waterscape or the political venues – was my home base during the first half of my fieldwork. With the help of a governmental secretariat in Tabasco, I established relations with Álvaro, who invited me to stay in his home for three months. Álvaro's family, and the town of Guadalupe, thus became a kind of transitional space for me too; from there, I extended my trips out to sea, along the river and into political meetings by the coast and in inland Tabasco. At the same time, without my actually having planned it, home and family in Guadalupe also became an important window onto the issues I had set out to study. As I navigated the everyday tensions of the prolonged environmental conflict, my immersion in family life, and my relations with Álvaro, gained heightened importance[I].

1.2. OUTLINE OF THE ARTICLES AND SYNOPSIS

The order of the four articles in this thesis reflects both the research process and the relationships of the articles' perspectives with one another. The first article examines the shifting framework of oil governance and its impacts on fisher communities, and the second shows how the local media figures in the environmental conflict. The third article draws on reflexive ethnography to demonstrate my methodological path and relations with interlocutors, which led me to adopt certain perspectives on the study of politics. The fourth article shows how fishers draw on their embodied relations with the sea environment to continue fishing and to make claims about the impacts of oil on fish. The different perspectives that the articles take complement each other by examining the offshore as both a lived social and political space and an object of governance. In the following, I briefly outline each article and the content of the synopsis.

In Article I, *Contested Claims over Space and Identity between Fishers and the Oil Industry in Mexico*, my co-author Anja Nygren and I examine how the shifting, hybrid mode of oil governance fragments the fishers' politics by communicating mixed messages and providing unlicensed and licensed fishers and their leaders unequal socioeconomic opportunities. The article further shows that in their efforts to contest and escape the tightening

[1] I have chosen to use a pseudonym for the town in the summary. In the articles, towns and cities are referred to by their names.

Photo 1.2 Shredding boiled pork meat for *tamales* with a neighbor during the first week of fieldwork

framework of governance, fishers and leaders draw on networks which grow out of their engagements with each other onshore and at sea.

In the second article (II), *The Politics of Justification: Newspaper Representations of Environmental Conflict between Fishers and the Oil Industry in Mexico*, my co-author Pia Rinne and I examine the politics of representation: who is allowed to speak about oil and fisheries, and how? Combining newsprint data and ethnographic material, the article suggests that local newspaper articles about the relations between fishers and the oil industry represent both oil and fisheries as inalienable patrimony: common, shared resources which connect fathers and sons and the nation. Through this portrayal, the newspapers reshape fishers' concerns by constructing a hierarchy between the two sorts of patrimonies where oil is valued over fish. In this way, the newspapers appear to be promoting the interests of fishers while in fact they are significantly diminishing the radicality of the fishers' demands. The article further shows how, fisher leaders are pressured to formulate their claims in the same language of patrimony.

Article III, *In Álvaro's House: Fisher Leaders, Family Life and the Ethnographer at Mexico's Oil Frontier*, examines my relationship with Álvaro, the political leader of fishers, in the

context of the prolonged conflict between the fishers and the oil industry. By showing how Álvaro and I sought to categorize each other, and how my initial frustrations became an analysis of Álvaro within the structure of incentives where he was situated, the article provides a background to my understanding of the fishers' politics. Álvaro's ambiguous political tactics as a leader mediating between the fishers and the oil industry, and between the world of oil politics and the world of fishing, are both also examined in Articles I and IV. The primary aim of Article III is to show that these perspectives grew out of my analytical perplexity at Álvaro's complicated position.

In Article IV, *Fishers' Knowledge and Scientific Indeterminacy: Contested Oil Impacts in Mexico's Sacrifice Zone,* I study the relations between fishers' seafaring lives and the law and politics of oil and fisheries. I argue that although claims by fishers and the oil industry over the impacts of oil express distinctly different relations with the sea environment, they are both similarly patchy and politically motivated. However, the legal-political framework of oil's impacts is not equipped to examine, much less recognize or value, the fishers' embodied, unarticulated claims. Through legal mechanisms and political narratives that allow for the externalization of oil's impacts in the marine environment, the Gulf of Mexico oil production area is made into a 'sacrifice zone', rendered exploitable by the idea of oil as a shared, common good.

This synopsis proceeds in the following way. The remaining parts of the introduction briefly situate my research in current academic discussions, and present my research questions and a contextualization of the thesis. Chapter 2 examines post-foucauldian theorization of oil's governmentality, discussions about justification theory, patrimony and sacrifice zones, and anthropological and geographic approaches to oceanic lifeworlds as radical alterity. Chapter 3 provides an overview of the methodology employed in the study. Chapter 4 presents the results of my analysis of the contested sea, and chapter 5 concludes the PhD thesis.

1.3. POLITICS OF OFFSHORE OIL AS AN OBJECT OF STUDY

In this chapter, I briefly situate my study within specific debates in development studies and related fields. Development research today is actively engaged with global environmental concerns and politics. The idea of a new epoch, the Anthropocene, where human activities are seen as destabilizing the planetary ecosystem, has provided a framework for discussing human-environment relations in new ways (McGregor 2017). Recent debates about 'transition discourses', using terms such as 'post-development' and 'degrowth', have drawn attention to the ecological boundaries to growth by examining radical political 'alternatives to development', which abandon ideas of development as progress (Escobar 2015; Gudynas 2016). For many Latin American extractive economies, these discussions have produced important analyses of recent politics regarding resource extraction and 'rights of nature'. However, these analyses have engaged primarily with environmental mobilizations articulating radical agendas for alternative development. Less attention has been given to sites and movements which do not exhibit radical agendas, and yet are

clearly attuned to environmentalist concerns that challenge hegemonic politics. With this as background, my PhD thesis tries to think with post-development and at the same time grasp different and complex worlds among environmental subjects without reducing them either to actors of development understood as progress, or to advocates of radical alternatives to development. This approach incurs challenges that are at once conceptual, methodological and political.

In many Latin American countries, such as Bolivia and Venezuela, post-neoliberal political projects have emerged in conjunction with the extractive boom (Perreault 2013; Schiller 2011), while in others, including Mexico and Argentina where long-term state-owned extractive industries have been privatized, governments have more explicitly drawn on neoliberal economic policies (Arroyo and Zalik 2016; Shever 2008). In their analysis of the extractive boom in Latin America, Bebbington and Bury (2013) emphasize that many of the struggles over extraction are not dramatic, organized movements, but often entail complex, contradictory and hidden everyday struggles.

Political ecological research, originally conceived as an attempt to combine "the concerns of ecology and a broadly defined political economy" (Blaikie et al. 1987: 17), has long examined the relations between extractive industries and surrounding communities with a focus on environmental conflicts (Peluso 2009; Peluso and Watts 2001). However, a conflict lens tends to pay less attention to the heterogeneity of social groups influenced by extraction, and to the complexity of everyday extractive politics that Bebbington and Bury (2013) urge us to examine. As a result, less visible everyday struggles in conditions where no open conflicts emerge remain less studied. Furthermore, while there are important ethnographic studies on the micropolitics of people living around extraction sites (Horowitz 2011; Warnaars 2013), oceanic environments remain understudied among the political ecologies of oil, although one third of oil and gas is currently extracted offshore and deep sea mining industries are growing rapidly (Maribus 2014).

In a corresponding vein, most political ecologies of maritime issues focus on fishing instead of analyzing the relations between the fishing industry and other strategically important maritime activities, such as the offshore oil industry. Overall, only a few studies (e.g., Breglia 2013; Reed 2009; Zalik 2009) examine the dynamic relations between fishers' livelihoods and offshore oil extraction operations, and even these focus more on what occurs onshore. As a result, both the sea and the seafaring actors who depend on it for their livelihoods tend to be construed into a backdrop of onshore governance instead of appearing as a lively social and political place with dynamic political actors. My aim in this thesis is to refocus on the sea as a particular kind of social space and a part of the sphere where everyday social networks and political relations are shaped. I suggest that attention to the relations between sea fishers and extractive industries on- and offshore inspires new ways of thinking about politics and provides socially relevant insights into the practices of maritime spatial planning.

Social movement and environmental justice studies form important fields within research on the so-called subaltern politics of the environment. Much of the work within

these fields focuses on understanding why certain social movements succeed in achieving their political objectives and why others do not (McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly 2008; Schlosberg and Carruthers 2010). These studies have sought to explain movement trajectories by analyzing "political opportunity structures" (Tilly and Tarrow 2007), movement members' motivations and movement dynamics (Agyeman et al. 2016; Wolford 2006). However, while this literature provided me with initial inspiration for thinking about the fishers' political tactics, especially with regard to shifting legislation, I have found its frameworks constraining. It has seemed to me that a focus on movements and 'resistance' is mediated by liberal democratic values, and cannot capture situated meanings of politics and the environment. Furthermore, for me, initial attention to social movement studies was not unrelated to the structure of incentives in the academy, where thinking about the political agency of those often described as subaltern usually occurs in the binary terms of resistance/compliance, rather than through considering the complexities of agency (III). To understand the sea fishers' everyday lives, I needed to expand the focus from political movements to examining the fractured governability of the offshore, narratives of patrimony and the entanglement of the seascape in sociality and politics.

Research inspired by Michel Foucault's thinking on governmentality and biopower has recently drawn attention to governance as heterogeneous, open-ended and often fractured (Collier 2009, McKee 2009). These discussions note the fact that governance always creates lacunae where things do not go according to plan. Furthermore, as Watts (2004b) has written, in the case of oil governance, the particular material characteristics of oil make it difficult to govern. Consequently, as my thesis suggests, current hybrid modes of oil governance draw on multiple authoritarian and neoliberal techniques to make oil extraction more easily governable. Employing these discussions on governmentality and governability as one important perspective in my thesis enables me to show the situated character of oil governance while highlighting the multiple constraints it sets on the fishers' political tactics and livelihood strategies. However, I have found that analysis of governmentality also needs to take into account how the sea environment shapes governance and politics.

Following the fishers' relations with the sea brings me to a second perspective in the thesis, that of difference. The debates about how to account, conceptually and politically, for difference within the politics of the environment have proliferated among anthropologists and geographers, and raised vibrant discussions about radical alterity and fundamentally different 'worlds' (Blaser 2013; de la Cadena 2015; St. Martin 2009). At the center of these discussions is the idea that, by following the different ecological practices of subaltern subjects, research can make visible politically important ways of relating to the environment which are often excluded from formal arenas of politics. However, the debates often focus on conceptualizations of difference within indigenous human-environment relations which present clear alternatives to current modes of resource extraction. Here, I seek to examine difference in thinking about the relations between maritime worlds and extractive politics. I do this by drawing together theoretical ideas about difference and the ethnographic study of human-marine relations in the context of oil extraction.

In addition to my participation in daily lives in both fishing-related and political activities within coastal fisher communities, the research design includes 93 interviews and extensive newsprint media analysis. Because of the multiple and often conflicting perspectives of different actors that I encountered during fieldwork, a tension between two different perspectives marks my work: one involving the everyday politics of oil and fisheries and the other the aquatic lifeworlds of fishing. Within the first, attention lies on power relations and within the second, on the meanings of mobility and being a fisher. However, following Álvaro's operations as a kind of political chameleon – meanwhile navigating the different arenas of oil-industrial compensation negotiation, legislative processes, elections campaigns and fishing and tourism activities in Tabasco's riverine and oceanic environments – provides an excellent analytical lens onto the mutual entanglement of these fundamentally different and unequal worlds. Therefore, instead of trying to resolve the tension, I chose to focus attention on Álvaro's mediatory tactics. Both politics and what remained beyond political arenas came together in the way Álvaro switched between the language of political claims to the oil industry and the language of moving and living with water.

1.4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

My thesis is based on the following three research questions:

How do new modes of oil and fisheries governance operate in Tabasco?
This question is addressed in Articles I and III.

How is the sea environment valued by the media, by the oil industry and by fishers and fisher leaders? The question is addressed in Articles II and IV.

How are fishers' lifeworlds articulated within the politics of oil and fisheries along Tabasco's coast?
This question is addressed in Article IV.

The theoretical debates that ground the formulation of the research questions are discussed in chapter 2 of this synopsis. By addressing the questions, my thesis contributes to opening political ecology more effectively to the study of the marine environment and its diverse actors as fundamentally social and political. Instead of examining the sea and fishers as objects to which politics 'happens' through exclusion, the thesis shows that attention to their mutual entanglement and everyday political activity constitutes the offshore as a dynamic space. Within theoretical discussion, the thesis more effectively connects development and maritime studies with discussion of diverging worlds. This opens the former to conceptualizing difference and partial connection between different worlds, and expands discussions on radical alterity beyond indigeneity to other debates on human-environment relations. Finally, I want to highlight the entanglement of the analytical work with personal and emotional aspects of fieldwork. The insights of my thesis are

very much the result of interpersonal relations and co-labor with Álvaro and other fishers and leaders within the transitional spaces between life onshore and offshore. My reflection on the research process also grounds the way I situate the thesis within political ecological, post-foucauldian and radical alterity discussions, and within reflexive ethnography.

1.5. COASTAL TABASCO AS AN INTERFACE BETWEEN LAND AND SEA

Tabasco's coastal zone bustles with fishers and oil. The 190-kilometer long coastline hosts three cities, two of which serve as ports for the offshore oil industry, and dozens of small fisher villages. The presence of oil in the landscape is palpable: oil pipelines crisscross the coastal lands, the horizon presents a view of oil platforms, and around the largest port, Dos Bocas, through which offshore oil and gas extracted from the Gulf of Mexico passes, gas-flaring pipes dominate the view. In the fisher villages and in their fishing areas, oil's presence is different. For many fishers, submarine pipes and offshore oil platforms are part of the infrastructure that both obstructs their fishing activities and forms the background for their navigation. For fisher communities living by coastline oil deposits, oil implies concerns about moving from under its sway, of finding homes and livelihoods in new places. For a very few fishers, the oil industry provides seasonal work as unskilled labor.

The coastal areas are home to several lagoons and a river delta which, together with the vast offshore, provide an environment for fisheries ranging from oyster harvesting and crab catching to coral reef and open sea fish. In the freshwater lagoons and the Grijal-

Photo 1.4 Gas pipe crossing a wet cattle field in coastal Tabasco

Photo 1.5 Permisionários and other fish businessmen weighing the incoming catch of *rayas* (rays)

va-Usumacinta river delta, using fishing nets, longlines, throw nets and traps and working from wooden kayaks and fibreglass boats, artisanal and small-scale fishers catch freshwater gar (*pejelagarto*) a variety of *mojarras*, snooks (*robalo blanco, robalo negro, chucumite*), prawns (*langostino*), river shrimp (*camarón de río*) and various crabs (*acamaya, cangrejo azul, jaiba*) (Mendoza-Carranza et al. 2008; Saury 2010: 78–82). In the lagoons, where connection with the sea raises the salinity of water, dozens of cooperatives cultivate oysters. Between the coastline and roughly 200 kilometers offshore, groups of three to five sea fishers use fishing nets and longlines and work from open fiberglass motor boats to catch cutlass fish (cintilla), gafftopsail catfish (*bandera*), king mackerel, snappers (*guachinango, pargo*) and wahoo (*peto*) (ibid.). Tabasco is Mexico's biggest producer of red snapper and the second biggest producer of prawns, oysters and snook. Of the total national fish production, Tabasco accounts for 2.5 percent (CONAPESCA 2013).

The communities engaged in fishing are heterogeneous in terms of their socio-economy, ethnicity and political status. Of the 7,000–8,000 fishers who fish in the coastal river

delta, lagoons and offshore, half are unlicensed (*pescadores libres*)[2] while the other half consists of cooperative fishers and license-holding entrepreneurs (*permisionários*), although the latter do not usually fish themselves. In addition, numerous people move between fishing and farming depending on the time of year. Many of the unlicensed fishers are former cooperative members, half of whom now work under casual arrangements for the wealthier permisionários while the rest are independent subsistence fishers and illegal commercial fishers. The proletarianization of the fishing communities, the competition over restricted space and the large number of unlicensed fishers who have limited political rights inevitably fragments their political agendas.

In the coastal villages, nearly all families depend directly or indirectly on fishing, and in two of the three cities, fishing continues to provide the main source of income for more than half of the population. Besides farming, many fishers diversify into other livelihoods – carpentry and metalwork, for example. The offshore drug trade also impacts the fishers' livelihoods, both by providing income and by forcing some to discontinue fishing due to the dangers related to moving in the drug trading routes. While most fishers from the coastal communities are mestizos[3], few riverine fishers speak Yokot'an[4] as their mother language (Muñoz-Sánchez and Cruz-Burguete 2013). Many of the sea fishers moved to Tabasco from fisher villages in Veracruz in the 1980s, and both fishers and fishing entrepreneurs consist of a high number of these mestizo migrants.

Fishing offshore is not a part of most women's everyday lives; however, they have recently gained more important productive roles in freshwater fishing, currently constituting approximately 7.5 percent of Tabasco's fishers (INEGI 2014). Women also specialize in catching and cleaning crabs and fish either to help their husbands or as seasonal employees of cooperatives or permisionários, sometimes with the help of their children. Women's input is also very important in collective fish-farming operations, which many seafaring fishermen do not find attractive (Mendoza Carranza et al. 2008:75; Saury, 2010: 82–86).

Globally, fish is one of the most traded food commodities and, according to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), it has tremendous importance for world-wide food security (FAO 2016). The FAO maintains that small-scale fishers are particularly important to both food security and employment (ibid.: iii, 8). Within the Latin American and Caribbean region, however, fishing is slowly decreasing while aquaculture production is vigorously growing. For Mexico, the FAO estimates that aquaculture will grow by 54 percent between 2013/15 and 2025 (ibid.: 173). Due to the high competitiveness of the global aquaculture sector, however, aquaculture depends less on hu-

[2] Based on estimates by a government fishing official (author's interview in 2011).

[3] While the concept mestizo is not commonly used in Mexico, in speaking about societies in Latin America, mestizo refers to those who have cultural heritage that incorporates both indigenous and European elements. In Mexico, the majority of people belong to this group.

[4] The Yokot'an indigenous group, also called Chontal, Maya-chontal or Maya-putún, is Tabasco's only indigenous group. The majority of Yokot'ans live in the municipalities of interior Tabasco. Many of those living in the coastal municipality of Centla are riverine and lagoon fishers.

Photo 1.6 A couple fishing by a riverine mangrove

man labor and more on technological developments, and is therefore not able to provide work for all former fishers.

Petróleos Mexicanos, or PEMEX, is the tenth largest oil company in the world and Mexico the fourth largest exporter of petroleum to the United States (US EIA 2016). After a fisherman, Rudesindo Cantarell Jiménez, accidentally discovered the Gulf of Mexico's huge marine oil field Cantarell, PEMEX has extracted oil offshore since 1977. Today, the giant Sonda de Campeche (Campeche Sound) complex in the Gulf of Mexico

accounts for 53 percent of Mexico's oil production (El Economista 2017). Since the early 2000s, PEMEX has expanded exploration and extraction with the support of private subcontractor companies. This has involved periodic closings of large coastal areas for seismological studies. In 2003, the government imposed security restrictions on traffic near oil installations in the Gulf of Mexico in a 15,907 km^2 marine zone of exclusion, established under the federal legislation 'Acuerdo Secretarial No. 117' (DO 2003). This bans all but oil industry operatives within the zone. While the agreement was justified on the grounds of its contribution to the prevention of terrorism and to security enhancement, one of its aims seems to have been to avoid offshore social confrontation, thus ensuring undisturbed oil production.

The historical role of oil as mediating between the people and the state in Mexico is reflected in the current relations between Tabasco's coastal populations and the state and oil industry. The symbolically powerful idea of oil as the nation's resource, belonging to all

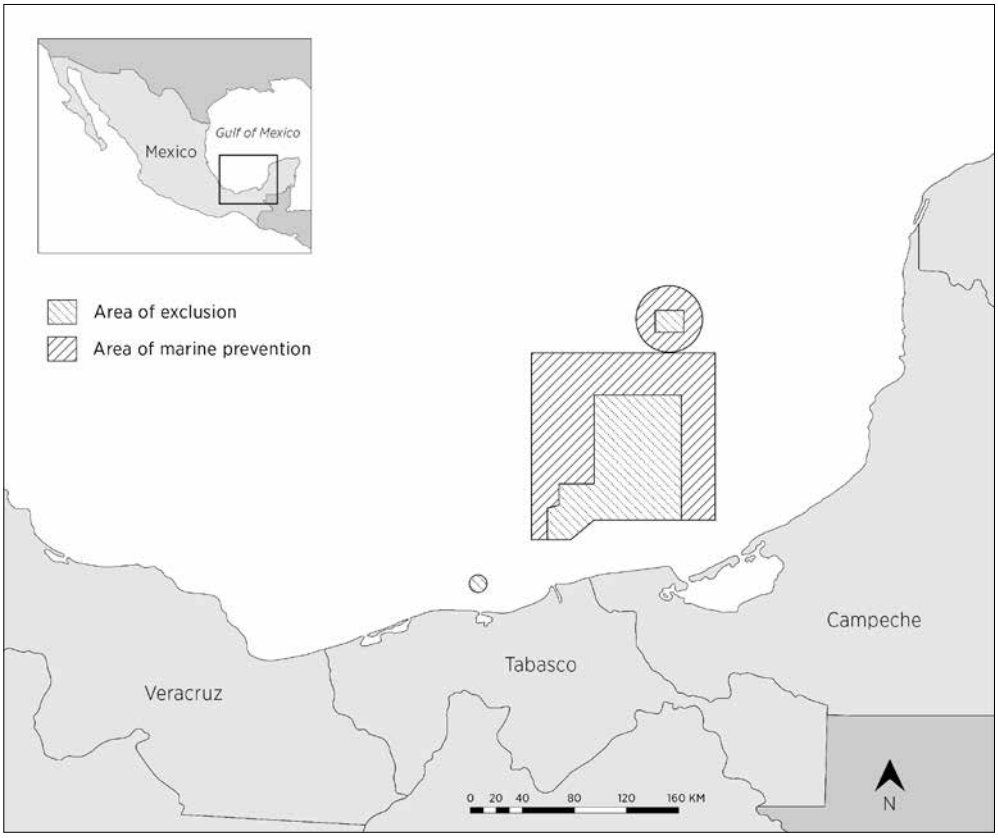

Figure 1. Marine zones of exclusion and prevention established in the Gulf of Mexico in 2003. Source of information: Anja Nygren's communication with PEMEX, 2015. In addition to these zones, marine traffic has also been periodically closed along the entire Tabasco coastline since the early 2000s.

Mexicans, has fueled peasant mobilizations for social benefits since the 1938 expropriation of the oil industry from foreign ownership (Gledhill 2002: 45). To restabilize its hegemony in the 1970s, the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) 'statisized' the economy by extending concessions to the peasant sector through its political networks and state clientelism, funded by Mexico's oil revenues (ibid.). In Tabasco and elsewhere, oil revenues have had a central role in mobilizations against the social and environmental impacts of oil (Breglia 2013). In 1976–1983, small farmers, fishers and trade unions organized a large-scale political movement, called Pacto Ribereño, against the oil industry. However, PEMEX and the government have sought to control both the Pacto Ribereño and more recent mobilizations by employing economic compensation, legal measures and political repression, including imprisonment for political leaders (Gúzman Ríos 2009).

The politics of oil have entered a new phase on a global scale (Zimmerer 2011). As Bridge and Le Billon write (2013: 3), this is characterized by changes in the availability, accessibility, affordability and acceptability of oil. Many of the formerly easily accessible reserves of oil are becoming depleted, and extraction is moving to environments such as deep seas, arctic areas and shales, which require new techniques and often imply new kinds of environmental risks and social tensions (Maribus 2014).

The deep and ultra-deep waters in the Gulf of Mexico, together with the Atlantic off South America and West Africa, hold the world's largest offshore reserves of oil and gas (Maribus 2014: 19). In 2015-2016, PEMEX also discovered several oil fields in shallow waters approximately 30–60 kilometers off the coast of Tabasco in the Gulf of Mexico (Figure 2) (PEMEX 2015), and is building new infrastructure to exploit the reserves. This took place right after the recent introduction of legal reforms to privatize the oil industry by President Enrique Peña Nieto's (PRI) administration (DOF 2014a, 2014b), despite opposition by a large proportion of Mexicans. Furthermore, the expansion is being carried out despite the current crisis in oil prices, which has deeply impacted the oil industry in Mexico and led to laying off thousands of workers.

With the recent privatization of the oil industry in 2014, the subsequent removal of fuel subsidies by the President Enrique Peña Nieto, and the ensuing rise in fuel prices in Mexico, public protests against PEMEX have surged around Mexico (La Jornada 2017). At the same time, with the increased popular criticism of PEMEX, questions about the social and environmental sustainability of marine resource extraction have become newly relevant in Tabasco's coastal areas. After a 13-year controversy over access to sea space between fishers and the oil industry, during which fishers' catches have decreased considerably, President Peña Nieto announced a federal plan in 2016 to reopen an area of 10,000 km^2 belonging to the 15,900 km^2 securitized zone of exclusion to thousands of fishers (CONAPESCA, SAGARPA 2016). To boost the local coastal economy, which has suffered the effects of the oil industry's recent paralysis due to falling oil prices, Peña Nieto has declared that a study of the Gulf's fisheries will be carried out to redefine the policies of access in the oil production area. However, journalists say that state authorities do not possess systematic knowledge of marine fish stocks which have not been studied for ten

years (El Expreso de Campeche 2016; Rumbo Nuevo 2017), and current studies by the National Fisheries Institute INAPESCA will not be finalized before June 2018 (author's correspondence with SAGARPA, 2017). Furthermore, the plans for reopening the zone of exclusion are being made at the same time as the oil industry expands into new areas (Televisa 2017). This leaves environmental harm and viability of the two industries' coexistence unexamined.

During my two-week visit to Tabasco in 2017, most fishers and fisher leaders with whom I talked had increasing doubts about the future viability of fishing. As the stocks of several species had fallen further, some families had moved to neighboring states either to continue fishing there or to find other work; those who had stayed were making a more meagre living off fishing. As I write in Article IV, the decrease of fish stocks is probably caused by both oil extraction and fishing and, they could be managed better if there existed political will. However, along with the privatization of PEMEX in 2014, new oil companies had arrived to explore and drill along the coast and in offshore areas. During fieldwork in 2017, government officials and researchers in Tabasco thought that the exploration and extraction that had been going on in 2011-2012 was minor compared with the current plans of the oil industry.

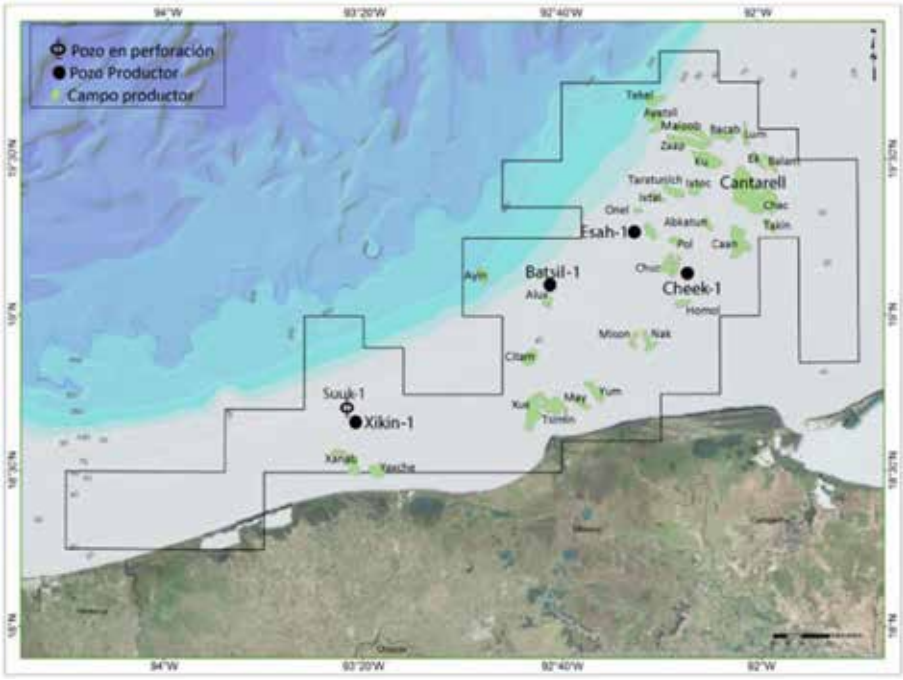

Figure 2. The Gulf of Mexico's offshore oil fields off the coast of Tabasco and Campeche.
The fields marked with a black dot, Batsil-1, Cheek-1, Esah-1 and Xikin-1, were discovered in 2015.
Source: La Jornada 2015, PEMEX 2015.

CHAPTER 2
THE SEA AS A LIVED SPACE AND AS AN OBJECT OF POLITICS

Michael Watts (2004a) writes that oil invokes politics where ideas about the nation, territory and identity figure centrally. According to him, the "oil complex" constructs diverse kinds of community, rule and identity (2004a:199). Watts' theorization is relevant for examining the ideas involved in diverse actors' claims to livelihoods in coastal Tabasco's hierarchical fisher communities. However, to understand how fishers and fisher leaders also make their lives and deal with each other in the everyday, in this thesis I analyze not only how the offshore oil industry shapes local lives but also how the sea environment is involved in the way fishers relate to politics.

In this thesis, there is an analytical trajectory where a post-foucauldian attention to the politics of representation gradually gives space to the lifeworlds of fishers. The trajectory reflects my epistemological commitment to going beyond analyzing the mechanisms and effects of power (under capitalism) to identify fractures which exist as marginal spaces of difference and alternatives. As Gibson-Graham (2003), in critique of Michael Watts' (2003) article on development and governmentality points out, Foucault himself recognized that we as researchers are participating in making a reality in which we are implicated and involved:

> [T]he function of any diagnosis concerning the nature of the present … does not consist in a simple characterization of what we are but, instead – by following lines of fragility in the present – in managing to grasp why and how that-which-is might no longer be that-which-is. In this sense, any description must always be made in accordance with these kinds of virtual fracture which open up the space of freedom understood as a space of concrete freedom, i.e., of possible transformation.
> (Foucault, cited in Gibson-Graham 2003: 35)

Grounded in these ideas, in the ensuing chapter I examine theoretical discussion about the politics of oil, narratives about the environment and the relations between politics and maritime worlds. The chapter also presents the key concepts of the PhD thesis: governmentality, sacrifice zones, patrimony and difference.

2.1. OFFSHORE OIL EXTRACTION, FISHERS AND FISHER LEADERS

It is hard to overestimate the role of oil in geopolitics. Since its discovery, struggles and conflicts over power and resources related to oil production have gone hand in hand. Current anthropological and political ecological studies on the politics of oil also emphasize volatility and violence (Behrends et al. 2011; Bridge and Le Billon 2013; McNeish and Logan 2013; Watts 2004b). However, without understating the wide-scale socio-environmental impacts of the oil industry in Mexico, the country's current extractive politics do not conform to the predominant imagery of open violence. Anna Zalik (2009), for example, draws attention to the significant differences among oil regimes in her comparative study of oil governance in Mexico and Nigeria. She suggests that socio-historically different territorial relations have contributed to the relative stability of the Mexican extractive regime and to the volatility of the Nigerian regime respectively.

Recognizing the diverse political landscapes that revolve around oil globally, Article I of my thesis inquires into the complexity of oil governance by conceptualizing it as a combination of logics of governance. Studies on governing have reappropriated Michel Foucault's concept of governmentality to account for the processes of privatization, deregulation and self-management involved in new modes of governance and subject-formation (Collier 2009; Ferguson 2010; Rose et al. 2006). Collier (2009: 99) calls for an analytical work that makes visible the diverse ways in which techniques of reasoning are combined, revealing neoliberal governance as a "heterogeneous space, constituted through multiple determinations, and not reducible to a given form of knowledge-power". With this formulation, Collier avoids approaching the concept as a machine and instead highlights the open-endedness of governance.

In her analysis of the governmentality of agrarian conflicts in Mexico, Nuijten (2004) explains the nonresolution of the conflicts by the combination of state repression and the reproduction of people's hopes of access to an elusive justice system. This, she argues, is characteristic of the operation of power in Mexico. Furthermore, Gledhill (2015) suggests that political control over oil is increasingly linked to the ways state power operates "behind masks" through the elite's strategies to re-impose authority by incorporating criminal actors into governance, co-opting others and criminalizing social movements. As the daily politics of oil, as it appears in my study, does not exhibit open violence in the exercise of power, the framework of subtle forms of governmentality appears fitting.

Informed by the above theorizations on governmentality and power, my thesis traces the hybrid ensemble of different discourses and political practices through which the governing of the sea space and fishers' subjectivity is being reformulated in Mexican oil politics. My approach to governmentality considers the mentality of governance as it is expressed both within the logics of governing and in the daily narratives and practices of those who are governed. Examining both perspectives enables recognition of the tensions and fractures that the operation of power involves. I am particularly interested in how historical ideas about oil as shared patrimony and experiences of the authoritarian era become combined with other logics of governing. By analyzing patrimony as part of governmen-

tality I thus seek to examine how a vocabulary about common resources and collectivities can at the same time be productive as a narrative of local belonging among resource users such as fishers, and restrictive as it is used by the government to exclude fishers from resources. While Article I is the only one that focuses on governmentality and discusses it explicitly, its analysis is closely connected to discussions on patrimony in Articles II, III and IV.

Watts (2004b: 55) suggests that to understand oil governance in detail, one needs to go beyond the framework of governmentality to examine the "perhaps ungovernable" spaces of oil politics. Mitchell (2011), furthermore, notes in his analysis of the politics of oil, that the material qualities of crude oil, as well as the investments and technologies required for its transformation into a global commodity, make oil extraction highly vulnerable to disruption. For this reason, Appel (2012) writes, the oil industry combines infrastructure, forms of expertise and fantasy to try and create an appearance of the industry's "modularity", that is, an impression of its disconnect from the practicalities of local life. According to her, the offshore provides a socio-spatially distinct environment for modularity, removed from entanglements with local society.

In addition to resource management through legislation and public regulation, oil regimes deploy other techniques to legitimize their operations and restrict the access of local populations to resources. In their research on hydrocarbon governance in the Gulf of Mexico, Breglia (2013) and Zalik (2009) demonstrate how – apart from the legal actions and state-policing involved in rendering the offshore available for private interests – the Mexican Government's welfare interventions encourage fishers to become entrepreneurial aquaculturists. Correspondingly, Sawyer (2004), Breglia (2013) and Himley (2013) show how corporations seek to transfer local claims to resource access from formal political arenas to voluntary programs of corporate social responsibility and community development.

The above discussions draw attention to the modes of governing oil and their fragilities and fractures. My thesis concurs with them, but highlights the particular character of offshore spaces for oil governance. My study shows how – despite the hybrid techniques of legislation, public regulation, modularity, narratives of patrimony and current neoliberal incentives for self-governance – governing offshore oil is conducive to the production of spaces of reduced visibility where things do not go according to plan. It is with these fractures in mind that I employ a post-foucauldian approach to governmentality (McKee 2009), and analyze both the conduct of conduct and what remains beyond it in the governance of offshore oil.

2.2. THE VALUE OF THE SEA ENVIRONMENT

Within environmental conflicts, media representations of the value of the environment play an important role in influencing ideas about the rightful exploitation of natural resources. In my thesis, I especially examine the notions of 'sacrifice', 'patrimony' and 'ecology' in the moral justifications made for and against oil extraction in the media and among fishers and the oil industry.

Discussion about 'sacrifice zones' among scholars concerned with environmental justice (Klein 2014; Lerner 2010; Morrone and Buckley 2011; Valenzuela Pérez 2016), examined in Article IV, highlights that political narratives about the inevitable and often unquestioned necessity of development draw on a more or less implicit imperative of sacrificing less valuable forms of life. As Valenzuela Perez (2016) notes, the discussion of sacrifice zones extends beyond the academy to recent critical public debates and the narratives of environmental social movements. Within the politics of extraction, this logic implies that the idea of development as a shared, greater good inherently demands social and environmental sacrifice. In Mexico, state narratives of oil as a patrimonial resource and a symbol of national pride and progress have long been linked in political discourse to the necessity of sacrificing private and public assets (including the environment) for the good of the nation. In the everyday extractive politics of the Gulf of Mexico's offshore, the act of sacrifice is enabled through the transformation of the oil production area into an enclosed, securitized environment where social and environmental harm are externalized.

Whereas Article IV discusses the idea of sacrifice zones present in the current politics of oil in Mexico, Article II shows how valuations of oil as 'patrimony' enable the privileging of oil above the marine ecology. In Mexico, common, post-revolutionary narratives of patrimony have been used to refer to inalienable common resources such as oil, silver and fisheries that play a central role in constituting patrimonial collectivities (Ferry 2005). Ferry (2005: 10) characterizes patrimony as a "highly charged 'root metaphor'" and a "vital feature of Mexican social, political and economic life", which is commonly used to make claims over resources and gain access to loci of power. Ferry (2005: 13) and Ilyin (2015: 46) suggest that the notion of the inalienability of common resources figures centrally in constituting patrimonial collectivities and power relations. Ferry writes that in Mexico this ideal encompasses both patrimonial resources and objects, such as tools, which take part in producing patrimony by uniting fathers and sons, thereby securing the continuity of patrimonial collectivities; this is a crucial notion that actors often invoke when making claims to alienable resources.

Furthermore, in Mexico patrimony is discursively imbued with the ability to designate collectivities, present the origins of existing power relations and explain how and why they should be maintained (Ferry 2005: 11; Breglia 2013: 97–99). Breglia's (2013) study of the relations between the oil industry and fishers in Tabasco's neighboring state, Campeche, reaffirms this. In her important account (2013: 14-5), ideas of a "patrimonial sea" provide highly contradictory discursive resources for different actors because they legitimate access to patrimonial assets for both the coastal fishing populations and the national collectivity as a whole.

The thesis also includes analysis of narratives that highlight the ecological value of the environment. By ecological, I refer to diverse concerns about the state of the marine ecosystem and its meanings to fishers. These narratives differ from ideas of patrimony in the sense that they do not establish a connection between ecology and the patrimonial collectivity but rather highlight the sea environment as the space of fisher-identity.

Theoreticians of moral justification Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) suggest that the moral valuations on which we usually draw when justifying claims in environmental conflicts have universal characteristics: a justification goes beyond merely stating a particular viewpoint to claim that it is both relevant for the common good and generalizable according to the criterion of a shared moral value. They further suggest that in current conflicts people tend to employ justifications that can be divided into seven different value orders that emphasize the civic, domestic, market, industrial, inspirational, fame-related or ecological value of the environment (Lafaye and Thévenot 1993; Thévenot et al. 2000).

However, as many have noted (Honneth 2010; Lounela 2015), Boltanski and Thévenot derive the seven categories from works by Western political philosophers without discussing why or how they might be applied to non-Western contexts. Furthermore, the authors have generated critique through their claim that justification is exclusively about value-based argumentation, drawing on the principle of 'common humanity'. Honneth (2010) suggests that the theory of justification should more comprehensively take account of the social structuration of moral values and the related links between values, interests and power, while Blok (2013), Latour (1998) and Lounela (2015) argue it should also account for the plurality of existing value systems and the diverse ways in which the environment is involved in the constitution of both humanity and values. My study draws inspiration from these critical re-examinations and from the important attention paid by communication studies (Gitlin 1980; Nygren 2006; Sobieraj 2010) to the role of power relations in how media outlets represent groups that could be described as subaltern. Furthermore, I pay special attention to how fisher leaders operate as mediators in the tactical deployment of specific valuations in specific political contexts. Bringing the media into focus highlights the unequal politics of representation by demonstrating who speaks in the newspapers and how, and how these narratives relate to fishers' everyday narratives.

2.3. THE OCEAN AS A PERSPECTIVE ON DIFFERENCE

When we expand analytical focus from the oil-producing offshore and the surrounding fishers as the sites and objects of governing, the ocean as a place of fishing becomes a differently dynamic social and political environment. In this subchapter, I bring together anthropological and geographic theorizations about maritime worlds and STS-oriented anthropologies about difference and other 'worlds' (III). The following discussion connects Articles I and IV.

Recent social scientific studies of the sea have opened up new ways of theorizing the role played by water in the making and unmaking of social worlds in the Anthropocene (Hastrup and Hastrup 2016; Helmreich 2011). Helmreich (2011: 137) writes about an ongoing "oceanization" as a new framework containing a reorientation to the sea as a translocally connecting substance. He draws attention to the ways in which social theory oscillates between "treating water as a natural and a cultural substance, its putative materiality masking the fact that its fluidity is a rhetorical effect of how we think about nature and culture in the first place" (2011: 132). Using the 2010 Gulf of Mexico oil spill crisis as

an example of the churning up of both nature and culture, he suggests the spill may best be understood by refusing that binary. Rather than use the substance of water "as the privileged province of scientific description, which is then simply drafted into cultural accounts that give that form different 'meanings'", Helmreich asks us to track how different actors themselves use water as a theory machine to anchor analyses of an oil spill (2011: 138).

Maritime studies have examined seafaring movement to show how maritime communities live with water in ways that exceed binaries between humans and the environment, and often also defy established ideas and regimes of governance based on the spatial fixation of people to place (Ingold 2011; Pálsson 1994; St. Martin 2009). Many of these discussions have continued the work of Gilles Deleuze, while others seek inspiration in the actor-network theory initiated by Bruno Latour, Michel Callon and others. Pauwelussen (2016), drawing on a Latour-inspired, actor-network analysis of fish traders in Indonesia, argues that the socially and spatially mobile (illegal) networks of female fish traders elude conservationists' attempts to protect marine resources. Escobar and Osterweil (2010: 201) emphasize the changing connections and mobilizations within subaltern networks, suggesting that a rhizomatic perspective helps to convey a sense of that which is not "pure opposition or resistance" but yet escapes control. Correspondingly, Lenco suggests (2014: 139) that a Deleuzian approach encourages the examination of emerging tactics of contestation within contexts of social change in a world where "uncertainties have replaced regularities".

In Tabasco, the fishers' mobility in offshore "taskspaces" (Ingold, 2000: 195–198) and ambiguous political arenas is key to understanding their everyday political tactics. In Article I, I draw on the above ideas to examine the fishers' rhizomatic ways of networking, seeking insights into the logic that characterizes connections among heterogeneous groups of marginalized people in contexts where institutional strategies of resource governance increasingly limit their livelihood options and political tactics. Instead of primarily conceptualizing fishers' networks as organized political activity, the concept of the rhizome allows for a more flexible analytical gaze that attempts to capture spaces of difference.

At the same time, I employ mobility and networks as perspectives on difference in human-environment relations. Attention to alterity has characterized recent debates about ontological plurality and decoloniality in anthropologies and geographies, some of which have been grounded in science and technology studies and others in "diverse economies" (Escobar 2008; Blaser 2013; Descola 2013; de la Cadena 2015; St. Martin 2009). In his important book, *Territories of Difference,* Arturo Escobar (2008) demonstrates that economic, ecological and cultural difference is deeply involved with people's relations with their place, analyzing how it informs Afro-Colombian mobilizations against the homogenizing tendencies of globalization. Correspondingly, Mario Blaser's (2010) political ontology of the Yshiro of Paraguay highlights difference as ontological and makes a decolo-

< Photo 2.1 Two Tabascans fishing cintilla by the coast

nizing argument for engaging with research subjects according to their ontological understandings of what constitutes reality. Blaser examines the Yshiro ontology as non-modern and, therefore, an alternative to hegemonic conceptualizations that separate nature from culture. In a related way, Kevin St. Martin (2009) examines fisheries as counterhegemonic spaces of place-based and economic difference that can provide alternatives to capitalist economies.

Most of these debates draw on a dichotomy between indigenous and/or other alternative economic and ecological practices, and modern or capitalist practices (for critique on some discussions in political ontology, see, e.g., Graeber 2015). Here, I want to expand this discussion by analyzing seafaring activity as a world of specific human-environment and interspecies relations. For my study, the productivity of 'difference' as a key concept lies in how it allows analysis of the exclusion of certain lifeworlds from politics, and how leaders of marginalized groups creatively draw on narratives of diverging worlds in their political navigation. My focus is on the relation of fishers' mobile lifeworlds to hegemonic politics which exclude and criminalize different ways of relating to the environment.

My analysis follows Marisol de la Cadena's theorization of human-environment relations as "excess" (de la Cadena 2010, 2015; Stengers 2005), which she conceptualizes as "something which is performed past 'the limit'", meaning that it lies outside generic public framings of a given phenomenon and is therefore non-existent and non-accessible through conventional understandings – in this case those concerning human-environment relations. Based on her fieldwork in Peru, de la Cadena suggests that the dimension of people's knowing and being in their environment, which transcends the modern nature-culture divide, remains beyond verbalization into recognizable or acceptable narratives in formal arenas of politics. Likewise, among Tabascan fishers, the embodied and sensory aspects of their seafaring way of life are simply not fully articulable in words, much less in political claims. Like Blaser, de la Cadena argues for acknowledging the radical difference of this excess instead of explaining it away in conventional social scientific terms.

In Article IV, I examine fishers' mobility and knowledge as excess. I am interested in how fishers articulate – or do not articulate – their mobility and knowledge about the impacts of oil on fish in politics, and how the oil industry and the government draw on 'science' to negate a political space for fishers' claims. However, instead of presupposing the fishers' identity and lifeworlds as an ontologically separate field, I approach their difference as an object of inquiry, seeking to analyze what constitutes it.

In the study of fishers and oil, examination of divergence among fishers' lifeworlds and the sphere of politics, and of contradictions within the fishers' ecological practices, is relevant for understanding how fishers deal with living in contexts of extractive politics. Attention to difference may also reveal alternatives to current, hegemonic modes of governing the world's oceans through intensified marine spatial planning (Boucquey et al. 2016; Snyder and St. Martin 2016).

To conclude this subchapter, I reiterate: examining the sea as part of dynamic social and political relations which are based on mobility turns it from an object of governance

into an object of inquiry. Thereby, difference also becomes an issue of analytical concern, not something to be taken for granted. Finally, examining how fishers live with oil, we need to examine both oil and the sea as part of the political setup.

In this chapter, I have examined theoretical discussion about oil's governmentality, media politics of environmental conflict and fishers' mobile networks and knowledge about the sea environment as the excess of politics. These theoretical ideas approach the offshore, including oil and fishers, as difficult to govern and, therefore, as objects of diverse techniques – both legal and extra-legal – of governance. While recognizing in Article I that oil governance globally shares characteristics from socio-spatial modularity to new forms of shifting responsibility, the thesis seeks to identify the situated character of governing oil in Mexico, where the history of authoritarianism and the current entanglement of criminal groups with the political elite impact how the conduct of conduct manifests in the everyday. Following Collier (2009) and McKee (2009), my post-foucauldian approach plots the complexity, contradictions and fractures of oil's everyday governmentality.

By examining competing moral valuations of the sea environment in Articles II and IV, I want to highlight both media and neoliberal oil governance as arenas of power where other sea-based livelihoods and human-environment relations have little space. Moral narratives about inevitable sacrifice and patrimony are examined here as narratives which support the enclosure of the Gulf of Mexico's environmental resources at a moment of the oil industry's privatization. The figure of the fisher leader as a political mediator, examined in Articles II, III and IV, moves between the worlds of oil politics, seafaring and the media by transforming claims over access to the environment into narratives recognizable and acceptable within current extractive politics.

The thesis also analyses the offshore as a social and political space where fishers' mobile networks reflect both their politics and their relations with the environment. Drawing on debates about movement, networks and difference, I examine mobility from the perspective of its operation as a space and mode of less visible, ungovernable contestations. Furthermore, I employ mobility to discuss the fishers' seafaring lifeworld as a dynamic and different locus of human-environment relations. By doing this, I expand the debates on radical alterity (Blaser 2013; de la Cadena and Lien 2015) to include fishing as a world of possibly alternative ecologies, yet one that is entangled with hegemonic ecological practices.

CHAPTER 3
MATERIALS AND METHODOLOGY

3.1. EMBODIED POLITICS

The theoretical discussion of the social dynamics of oil extraction has seen a rapid increase in the last fifteen years. Scholars such as Appel (2012), Barry (2013) and Mitchell (2011) have focused on the role of oil's materiality in the way its governing is organized. By contrast, there has so far been little concern over how to reconcile a 'materialist' approach with one that privileges the points of view of natives who live with oil (see Larkin 2013 on infrastructure). In my thesis, one challenge has been to bridge the gap between a focus on the governmentality of oil and the embodied practice of fishing. Connecting theoretical interests with methodological concerns about accessing and moving around in the arenas of politics and fishing has been a long process. In the following subchapters, I present the materials and methods used throughout my thesis project, following the development of the research process in a mostly chronological order. This allows me to discuss my methodological choices in relation to the evolution of my research themes and thoughts about them during my fieldwork and the overall research process.

The data for my research are drawn from four months and two weeks of ethnographic fieldwork among fisher leaders and fishers, during which time I took part in their daily fishing operations and political activities, and two months of fieldwork among governmental and oil industrial representatives in 2011, 2012 and 2017. In addition, I carried out an analysis of 213 newspaper articles (II) and public documents.

3.2. GOVERNING THE SEA

Since I was pursuing a largely ethnographic analytical strategy, the research process involved certain pre-set objectives and many loose ends. As I discuss in detail in Article III, my research was also shaped considerably by the sensitivity of my subject. Throughout my ethnographic fieldwork, as I had planned beforehand, I examined the logic of the shifting politics of resource access in the more conventional venues, from legal hearings to political meetings and everyday life. Approaching the sea as a political space, however, was a gradual process, which grew out of the fieldwork dynamic itself instead of earlier political ecological studies, many of which tend to treat the sea as a mere backdrop to politics.

During the first three-month trip to Tabasco in 2011, I lived with Álvaro and his family in downtown Guadalupe. I participated in the family's daily life and in the fishing ac-

Photo 3.1 An unlicensed fisher washing himself in his backyard after night-fishing cintilla

tivities of fishermen who worked for Álvaro, a cooperativist fisher family and unlicensed fishers, all members of Álvaro's networks. (In 2012, I also participated in the fishing and family life of a third fisher family.) I followed Álvaro's political meetings to the extent he allowed, and interviewed further leaders of fishers in Guadalupe and other coastal cities and villages. From Álvaro's home, I extended my journeys to the offices of governmental departments and PEMEX, the parastatal petroleum company, and to the compound of a subcontractor company exploring for oil near the coast. Gradually, I also gained access to some meetings between the oil companies and fishers, and the government and fishers. My relations with Álvaro, however, had the most profound impact on the development of my thinking; Article III examines the politics of oil from the perspective of my methodological path. In addition to the first period of fieldwork's shaping the perspective of my third article, it also contributed many insights on the governing techniques of the oil industry and the government, and fishers' relations with the sea environment, examined in Articles I and IV. In 2017, I spent two weeks mostly among fishers and government officials in Tabasco.

3.3. AT THE SEA AND BY THE RIVER

I did not begin writing the articles until the end of the second three-month period of fieldwork in 2012. It was only during this trip that I found a way to access a community of unlicensed sea fishers beyond Álvaro's networks, and to interview more people working in

Oil platforms and oil industry ships 10 km off the coast

the oil companies. During this time, I lived for a week with an unlicensed fisher family in the community. However, at the same time as I gained a better understanding of the differences and hierarchies within the coastal communities, and learned about the relations between PEMEX, a geophysical subcontractor company and the fishers, my ethnographic access to the oil companies was delimited to a few meetings and interviews. At the time, the relations between the oil companies and fishers were tense, which I suspect contribut-

ed to the companies' reluctance to further engage with me. Consequently, my ethnographic focus turned increasingly to the fishers.

My two field trips in 2011-2012 and a two-week trip in 2017 involved participation in, and observation of, fishing activities among three fisher families and several groups of unlicensed fishers in the river delta, along the coastline and 10 kilometers offshore, during 13 fishing trips which lasted from three to ten hours. During these trips, I either participated by rowing a boat or just travelled on the boat, observing the use of gillnets, thrownets and longlines, and the fishing of gafftopsail catfish, red snapper, snook and tilapia, among other species. Living in a fisher household, I naturally also observed fishing-related activities onshore, from the making of fishing nets to the cleaning and selling of fish.

I spent most of my fishing time with Álvaro's family and the two other fisher families. In 2011, Álvaro was the first to take me onto the water in his fiberglass boat and show me important fishing spots. We twice travelled up the river and along the coast and, while Álvaro did not fish himself, two unlicensed fishers travelled with him with whom I later fished. In addition to fishing, Álvaro showed me his freshwater fish-farming operations. The cooperativist fisher family that I got to know lived by the river and had a fibreglass boat and a fishing license. The father, mother and eldest son fished together, and took me on their fishing and shrimp catching trips on the river and by the coast altogether six times. The other family lived by the sea and had no fishing license. Their fiberglass boat had been bought from a permisionário with a loan. I lived and fished with this family for a week in 2012 and also spent time with them beyond my stay in their house, coastal fishing with the husband and his brother-in-law on two occasions. In addition to these trips, I participated in two fishing trips 10 kilometers offshore with two different groups of unlicensed fishers.

Participation in the fishers' embodied movement around the aquatic spaces meant knowing the sea as a lived place, a medium that connected other places to each other (Pauwelussen 2017). Through movement, fishers enacted their relations with the environment (see de la Cadena 2010). In other words, the sea was a special territory where fishers engaged with the environment and with each other through various collective arrangements of sharing space. Furthermore, it continued to be a place where fishers and oil workers engaged with each other when fishers worked in proximity to the oil platforms, although this occurred in more constrained ways than it had in the past.

3.4. ETHNOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS AND INTERVIEWS

My approach to ethnographic knowledge-construction has been influenced by anthropologies that highlight personal aspects (Borneman and Hammoudi 2009; Cerwonka and Malkki 2007) of engagement, both with water (Pauwelussen 2017) and with politically sensitive themes (Taussig 2011), the latter of which is the theme of my methodological article (III). Researching a conflict between fishers and the oil industry has obliged me to try and understand their different perspectives. However, it is obvious that my perspective is closer to that of the fishers' with whom I spent a considerable portion of my field-

work (III).

My data consists of ethnographic participation, observation and discussions, 93 interviews and newspaper and document analysis (Annex I). Most of the interlocutors, especially among the oil companies and government agencies, preferred that I did not record our discussions, and while fishers did not usually object, our daily interactions were often so full of action that a notebook worked better. I took notes of approximately 4/5 of the conversations and interviews and recorded the rest. I carried out a qualitative content analysis of the research data by coding it with ATLAS.ti.

Of particular use in analyzing the ethnographic, interview and newspaper material was an approach to storytelling and narratives that not only recognized their aspect as personal stories but also emphasized their interconnectedness with power relations. Ezzy (1998: 247) defines narratives as stories reflecting the politics of storytelling; they are construed from "available and sanctioned" elements, influenced through institutionally located power. Hence, what is said and how, and what remains unsaid, is not without connection to politics. This conception is also compatible with the in/articulability of human-environment relations that fishers enacted through their fishing practices.[5] Ethnographically grasping embodied practices was a way to examine the in/articulability of fishing and to analyze its narratability into political claims.

3.5. NEWSPRINT DATA

Article II of this thesis combines ethnographic analysis with newsprint material from two Tabascan newspapers. Including the media in the inquiry was part of my initial research plan. It opens a wider, richer perspective onto the resource politics by presenting the popular narratives at play, and by showing their connections with the fishers' narratives (Krzyzanowski 2011). At the same time, media analysis demonstrates the degree of critique expressed by local newspapers in Mexico.

The media material analyzed consists of 213 articles: 87 from *Presente* and 126 from *Tabasco Hoy*, from the years 2003–2004 and 2007–2012. These years involved important political shifts that had an impact on relationships between the fishing and oil industries, and on the thematic focus of news coverage. In 2003, the zone of exclusion was established, followed by frequent protests in 2004; from 2007–2008 onwards, the oil industry intensified offshore explorations, and from 2010, due to the decline in production at Sonda de Campeche, explorations also increased, particularly along Tabasco's coastline. The establishment of the zone of exclusion and the coastline explorations are both reflected in the peaks in dispute coverage in 2004 and 2010, and in a relatively high number of articles in 2011 and 2012 as well. Content was gathered by reviewing the print and electronic

[5] Storytelling is also a key concept in Mario Blaser's political ontological work *Storytelling Globalization from the Chaco and Beyond* (2010). Blaser understands storytelling as both narratives and as performances whose purpose is to shape the world into a pluriverse where different worlds can co-exist. I, however, understand storytelling in a more narratological sense.

archives of the two newspapers, in the latter case employing Spanish keywords for fishing (*pesca*, *pesq-*), oil (*petrol*, *-eo*) and the oil company (Petróleos Mexicanos or PEMEX). After examining all the possible articles, those that discussed relations between coastal fishers from Tabasco and the oil industry were selected.

As most of the data concerned representations of fishers' perspectives, I and my co-author, Pia Rinne, focused on how the fishers' views were framed and on the rhetorical justifications for fishers' resource access. We carried out a qualitative content analysis of the articles by identifying the main themes, the news sources and the main actors, as well as the claims and arguments of the latter (see, e.g., Gorin and Dubied 2011). The main themes of each article were identified from headings and subheadings, whereas the claims presented and arguments provided were identified from the entirety of the text.

CHAPTER 4
CONTESTED SEA

4.1. A FUZZY ENSEMBLE

In this chapter, I present the main insights of my analysis. To begin with, it has drawn on recent discussion by Collier (2009) and McKee (2009) grounded in Michel Foucault's work on governmentality and biopower that examines the ensemble of different techniques and styles of reasoning. In line with this thinking, in Articles I and III, I show how the current oil governance in Tabasco draws on a hybrid ensemble of techniques and styles of thinking wherein legislative regulation is combined with extra-legal activities. The 'mentality of governing' involved in this ensemble consists of diverse forms of control and exclusion, and new ways of shifting responsibility for resource exclusion onto local resource users themselves.

Article IV demonstrates how the politics of scientific evidence concerning oil's impacts, grounded in legislation, prevents official recognition of the oil industry's impacts. Fishers' claims regarding how oil and seismological studies relate to marine ecosystems, and fish in particular, are deemed invalid by the government and the oil industry. Also legal processes to demonstrate environmental harm, which rely on testimonial evidence, work against the fishers. This communicates a sense of the oil industry as unpunishable.

Article I shows that at the same time as the legal framework essentially works to displace both fish and fishers from the sea, it also largely displaces the fishers' political claims from official arenas to extra-legal venues where governance draws on a combination of clientelist negotiation and new forms of subjectification and responsibility-shifting. Oil companies' CSR programs in which clientelist deals are replaced, such as that mentioned in the introductory paragraph of the thesis, become arenas of political negotiation, while the fishers are aware that the compensations offered are not sufficient to cover the loss of a way of life. Furthermore, multiple actors – from various governmental institutes to oil companies – are involved in the negotiations, which makes it difficult for fishers to understand which entity is officially responsible for what in the re-regulation of the offshore. Concurrently with the ongoing displacement and confusing arrangements for taking responsibility, the government seeks to incentivize small-scale fishers to become new kinds of entrepreneurial fish farmers, although virtually none of them can afford the investments and paperwork required for aquaculture. Furthermore, most fishers are not interested in farming, as it means a very different way of life from fishing.

The 'mentality' of this new mode of governing, which involves authoritarian control and neoliberal subjectification, is simultaneously old and new. Articles II and III show that it invokes the experience of the authoritarian era and the historical, symbolic importance of the state's oil as patrimony, while Article I highlights how it diffuses questions of responsibility at the same time. In terms of its impacts, the oil governance makes it difficult for fishers to engage in organized counter-politics. In Article III, I suggest that, especially from the point of view of fisher leaders, the history of state ownership of oil complicates the formulation of claims which contradict narratives of oil as a symbol of national pride and a shared patrimonial, greater good. Article I also further highlights how the operation of power reinforces existing social and economic hierarchies between fisher leaders, fisher entrepreneurs and practicing fishers by providing highly unequal opportunities for political and economic inclusion. This also fragments the fishers' politics.

4.2. PATRIMONY AND DIFFERENCE

Based on my analysis of newspaper narratives in conjunction with fisher leaders' and fishers' narratives, I show in Article II that both newspapers and some fisher leaders construct the Gulf's oceanic resources as patrimony. By portraying both oil and fisheries through the hegemonic, ambiguous language of patrimony, these narratives construct a hierarchy between the national, patrimonial collectivity of oil and the local collectivity of fisheries. In other words, 'patrimony' lacks a radical claim to livelihoods and identity, as it does not challenge the primacy of oil.

The media narratives, which rely primarily on fisher leaders and fishers as sources, reshape the fishers' claims by portraying the Gulf of Mexico as patrimony. Furthermore, the newspapers present a certain inevitability in the power relations between Petróleos Mexicanos and fishers, representing the former as unpunishable and the latter either as victims or as irresponsible resource-users in need of governmental control. The effect of the newspaper representations is that they allow the papers to appear to be supporting the fishers' concerns while rarely presenting evidential material or examining the legislation or juridical processes. This, and the fact that the articles very seldom engage with representatives of the oil industry, gives the appearance that fishers are isolated in a solitary monologue without managing to fully engage either the state, the industry or the media.

In everyday narratives about access to sea space which I encountered during fieldwork, many fisher leaders also construed oil and fisheries as patrimony, while unlicensed fishers were more likely to highlight the sea as bound to their way of life and also valuable for its ecosystem. Fisher leaders usually noted that oil was necessary for the nation, and that there had to be a way for fishers and the oil industry to coexist. They saw that the conflict between the two patrimonies required 'negotiation' instead of outright protest to stop the oil industry. Furthermore, the leaders did not discuss questions of environmental harm and fisher identity (as ecological values), but emphasized offshore fishing as necessary for subsistence. These issues also show that the idea of patrimony, analyzed in Article II, comprised part of the ensemble of governing, studied in Article I, by constraining the available

political narratives, although it at the same time enabled a productive vocabulary for discussing community and belonging.

In quotidian discussions, most fishers – licensed and unlicensed – rejected the idea that the 'greater good' justified restrictions on their fishing grounds. The idea of patrimony, however, divided the two groups, as it provided them with unequal opportunities for belonging to the state-acknowledged collectivity. In order to maintain the official fisher identity that the unlicensed fishers lacked, licensed fishers often justified resource access by referring to their ownership of fishing licenses and their entitlement to state protection of their livelihood.

Ecological justifications, which highlighted the environment's value in terms of ecology and fisher identity, were nearly nonexistent in newspapers. In the everyday arenas of fishing, however, most fishers and many leaders thought that regaining resource access simply meant restoring the entitlement to fishing grounds integral to their cultural existence as fishers. This conception involved the ecological justification (Blok 2013; Latour 1998). Fishers and leaders expressed the ecological valuation of sea space when telling heroic stories of life at sea or sharing their knowledge of various marine species and their uses. Characteristic of the accounts was how they portrayed fishers within their sea environment, rather than discussing the world of patrimony and its associated ideas of collectivity, co-operative labor, family and continuity. Furthermore, unlicensed fishers' everyday conceptions of free movement in offshore space, away from co-operative politics and government surveillance, were expressed as constitutive of their fisher identity.

To conclude, the newspapers' rare references to legislation and rights, on the one hand, and different fishers' arguments that resource access was a question of human dignity and an issue for legislation, on the other, further demonstrated diverging arguments about fairness. This emphasized that the media downplayed, while fishers highlighted, the importance of the law in determining resource access. The fishers' arguments also showed that, in the everyday, ideas of rights and entitlement did not involve a complete abandonment of notions of patrimonial dependencies and hierarchies, which remained a part of how the different fishers asserted fairness.

4.3. THE OCEAN AS A SACRIFICE ZONE

The idea of sacrifice zones links many of the thesis discussions together. It addresses the underlying values of current oil governance and their manifestation in everyday politics between the oil industry and fishers. In Article IV, I suggest that the politics of oil extraction are not equipped to examine or recognize fishers' knowledge claims about the impacts of the oil industry on fish and fishing. While scientific claims about such impacts draw on similar kind of patchy and politically driven knowledge as the fishers' claims, assigning the Gulf of Mexico's oil production area exclusively to the industry makes it possible for the state to exclude fishers both from offshore fishing grounds and from politics. At the same time, the current legal mechanisms make it very difficult for fishers to officially demonstrate the oil industry's harmful impacts on fish, or use their claims to defend their access rights.

In Article IV, I also suggest that from the perspective of the marine ecology and fishing, the oil production area, where important fishing grounds are located, is constituted as a sacrifice zone by the new politics. The rationality underlying the intensified extraction places the oil industry's value to the national economy higher than the value of ecology or the fishers' livelihoods. In other words, it is not that the offshore space is not valued; rather, the valuation of oil as a shared greater good, a narrative that continues to find popular resonance among Mexicans, requires the neglect of the environment and fishers.

4.4 NETWORKS, MOVEMENT AND KNOWLEDGE

In Tabasco, intensified control of the sea space by the government and the oil industry has pushed fishers to deploy less visible tactics of contestation among the different groups. The thesis follows the fishers' seafaring movements and narratives to show that the unbounded sea is part of their sociality, identity-making and knowledge claims.

A central proposal of my thesis is that, although attention to the governmentality of oil and fishing provides important insights into the politics of oil, more research should be conducted into the sea as an important locus of fishers' social networks in the context of tightened regulation. Despite the restrictions on their space for making a livelihood, many fishers continue fishing in the prohibited areas out of economic necessity. To further account for politics from the fishers' perspective, the thesis suggests we also need to examine how politics overlap with the fishers' relations with the sea. In Articles II and III, I examine the ocean as a space that sustains networks with others and produces knowledge for mobile fishers. The analysis draws on discussions of movement, rhizomatic networks and radical difference – both those taking place among anthropologists and geographers inspired by STS and alternative economies, and also within maritime studies.

For fishers, livelihood and life depends on mobility (Ingold 2011, Pálsson 1994), and movement also figures importantly in how fishers narrate and practice fishing. Generally, fishers connect movement with a sense of freedom and courage, and a way to claim the unbound sea as theirs. Movement on and across the water also produces a sense of intimacy with marine life, and fishers often joke affectionately about the different species (IV).

At the same time as the sea constitutes fishers, it also provides the environment for important networks among them. In Article II, I suggest that fishers' social ties are rhizomatic, as they endure the shifting regimes of governance in spaces that are less visible to formal everyday politics. Article II further suggests that while these networks are not primarily political or the sites of resistance, they provide a resource for fishers trying to evade the government and the oil industry's development activities which seek to render them docile cooperators. Here, movement and rhizomatic networks are modes of endurance and escape.

The sea also offers a perspective on difference and the operation of politics. Drawing on de la Cadena's theorizations about politics and its excess, I show in Article IV how the fishers' fishing practices, environmental knowledge and narratives about the impacts of the oil industry on fishing, are based on their intimate relations with the ocean and

shaped by political interests. Hence, fishers claim that oil extraction damages their fishing nets and seismic studies kill and displace fish from their habitats for several years. Article IV demonstrates that the fishers' knowledge is often patchy, internally contradictory and shaped by their social and economic interests. At the same time, knowledge about the impacts of the oil industry on fish presented by the state and the oil industry contains corresponding gaps, contradictions and political interests. Within the politics of the zone of exclusion, the embodied, often disarticulated knowledge of the fishers is not legible, as the governing of the zone privileges the oil industry. As a result, the difference contained in the fishers' seafaring way of life and in their embodied environmental knowledge remains beyond what the state is equipped to examine, let alone accord proper representation or full recognition. Article IV suggests that the fishers' knowledge claims constitute the excess of politics, connecting with de la Cadena's theorizations about human-environment relations which diverge from conventional conceptualizations that underwrite modern politics of the environment.

CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSIONS

This study has examined the politics of offshore resource access among fishers, fisher leaders and the oil industry. I have presented and discussed four different perspectives on fish-and-oil politics: first, post-foucauldian and political ecological interpretations of oil's governability; second, anthropological and geographic examination of the sea as a source of politics and radical alterity; and third, interconnections and disjunctures between local newsprint media and fisher narratives about the value of the sea environment. The fourth perspective, examining the role of ethnographic methodology in demonstrating the situatedness of this specific environmental conflict in the marine world, has grounded my work on the other three. The overall approach has been motivated by the recognition that, through social analysis, we as scientists are participating in making a reality in which we are implicated and involved.

My first research question asked how oil and fisheries governance operate, a question, which I examined by focusing specifically on the 'conduct of conduct' within oil and fisheries governance in Tabasco. In studying this question, I was also interested in discovering what in the fishers' and their leaders' engagements with the oil industry remains unexplained by 'the mentality of governing'. The second research question asked how the sea environment is valued by the media, by the oil industry and by fishers and fisher leaders. The third asked how fishers' lifeworlds are articulated within the politics of oil and fisheries along Tabasco's coast.

Political ecological studies on the politics of oil have been important in demonstrating the violence and unequal socioeconomic impacts involved with oil governance. There is, however, a need to further study sea environments and marine extraction as spaces of everyday politics and of difference, a role which in the context of global environmental change is highly important. By drawing on fieldwork among fishers, fisher leaders and oil industry and government actors, I have suggested that the governmentality of offshore hydrocarbons in Mexico comprises a fuzzy ensemble of authoritarian and market-based rationalities, while at the same time, many sea fishers continue breaching mobility restrictions by fishing in the offshore oil extraction zones. By studying the sea space as one of competing environmental-social practices, the thesis has shown it as both an object of new modes of governing and a lived space of mobile networks and knowledge that connects places and people and construes fisher identity.

With respect to the role of methodological choices in theorization, the thesis addresses two issues: the ethnographic study of political mediators in environmental conflict, and the study of water-based livelihoods. My following of Álvaro's politics has had the consequence of breaking down dichotomies of resistance/compliance, common in social movement studies, and this has led me to examine the incentives and lack thereof in academia for thinking about the heterogeneity of so-called subaltern environmental politics. By showing the complex incentives for fisher leaders to engage in clientelist negotiation and narratives of patrimony, I have sought, at least partially, to avoid a simple juxtaposition between 'industry' and 'community'. At the same time, drawing on water-based fieldwork, I have wanted to show that the sea environment and difference – understood as the fishers' identity and their particular, embodied and sensory environmental knowledge – are entangled in the fisher leaders' politics but cannot be fully articulated.

In the thesis, I have demonstrated that the shifting operation of power displaces fishers from politics, provides unequal access to resources for different fishers and further accentuates socioeconomic hierarchies between unlicensed and licensed fishers, fisher entrepreneurs and political leaders. I have also shown that it does not recognize fishers' knowledge of oil's impacts on marine ecosystems. Consequently, whereas both fishers' and the oil industry's 'scientific' knowledge involves corresponding patchiness and politically interested motivations, the law and the politics of oil are not equipped to examine the fishers' embodied and partly non-verbalized knowledge. Furthermore, the thesis has suggested that the current rationality of governing oil intersects with newspaper representations in constructing both oil and fisheries as patrimony, a formulation that privileges oil over fisheries. On the level of political and legal practice, however, as Articles I and IV show, the valuing of oil draws on constituting the environment of the Gulf of Mexico as a sacrifice zone where social and environmental harm are externalized.

Thousands of fishers continue living within the constrained offshore spaces, although my thesis has shown that they are not organized politically to resist the oil industry's occupation of their fishing grounds. However, I have suggested that the fishers' movements in the sea environment form an important space for their rhizomatic networking with each other. The networks of co-labor are essential for survival both on- and offshore, and not primarily political, but they do provide fishers with resources for escaping and enduring the constraining framework of environmental governance. Furthermore, in making knowledge claims about oil's impacts on fish, the fishers draw on their movements and their embodied relations with the sea environment. I argue that rather than constituting ontologically different relations with the sea environment, the fishers' lifeworlds and knowledge are different from land-based lives, and not fully articulable into political narratives. These results are relevant within the current situation in which the federal state plans to reopen a part of the zone of exclusion to Tabasco's and Campeche's fishers. Since marine fishers generally know a lot about changes in the distribution and abundance of marine animals (Haggan et al. 2007), their knowledge about fish stocks and fish behavior could complement the information gathered by INAPESCA and provide for a more de-

tailed analysis of the sustainability of fishing in the Gulf of Mexico.

My research makes a contribution to debates drawing on Michel Foucault's work about governance and political ecological discussions about oil's governability. I argue that rather than relying on one technique of governing, oil needs multiple techniques, and yet is vulnerable to disruption. The thesis emphasizes offshore oil's requirements for a particular kind of governing, and casts light on the ensemble of legal and extra-legal techniques that take part in it in Tabasco. Furthermore, by following the fragilities and fractures of governance, the thesis demonstrates the situatedness of oil's governance.

I also suggest that Boltanski and Thévenot's justification theory requires revision to account for the entanglement of justification with power and politics, and to instill an openness to the situatedness of values and politics. In Tabasco, representations of both oil and fisheries as patrimony involve the highly unequal valuation of the respective patrimonial collectivities: the nation as the patrimonial collectivity of petroleum, and the local fisher community as that of fisheries resources. Furthermore, patrimony as part of the governmentality of oil involves certain moral valuations of resources and social relations; making claims of fisheries as patrimony means that while the claims defend the local within processes of shifting resource governance, they also provide justification for existing power relations and enable unequal possibilities for appropriation by different subaltern groups.

At the margins of offshore oil politics, fishers continue fishing and construing themselves as mobile seafarers. By bringing STS-oriented anthropologies and geographies of difference to development studies, I seek to open the debates about radical alterity to take in maritime issues in development studies, and vice versa. I suggest that examining fishers' lifeworlds through notions of difference and excess may enrich those political ontology debates which seek nuanced political analysis based also on the identification of 'partial connections' between worlds. I correspondingly suggest that considering fishers' lifeworlds and mobility through ideas of radical alterity opens maritime themes within development studies to a more profound recognition of the offshore as a social and political space.

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ANNEX I
Interviews in Tabasco in 2011, 2012 and 2017

Interviewee status	Interviewees total	Interviews total	men	women
Fisher leader	10	14	10	0
Fishing entrepreneur	3	4	3	0
Cooperative fisher	9	9	9	0
Unlicensed fisher	14	6	12	0
Petróleos Mexicanos	8	4	8	0
Geophysical company	4	3	3	1
Secretariat (mediator)	13	14	12	1
Federal and state Fisheries agencies	12	12	12	0
Local fisheries agency	3	3	3	0
The Federal Attorney for Environmental Protection	1	1	1	0
Federal fisheries researcher	1	1	0	1
Other governmental agencies and ex-officials	5	5	5	0
Port captain	1	1	1	0
Parliamentarian	1	1	1	0
NGO	5	5	5	0
Researchers (biologists, historians, sociologists)	9	7	7	2
Journalists	5	3	4	1
TOTAL	104	93	96	6

Many of the leaders are also fishing entrepreneurs, but I have only counted them as fisher leaders. The discrepancy in the number between interviews and interviewees is due to the fact that some of the interviews were group interviews and some interviewees were interviewed several times. As the table only includes interviews and not the important ethnographic conversations and observations, fisher women and wives of fishers and fisher leaders are underrepresented in the table, because my engagement with them consisted of conversations.

ANNEX II
List of events: Fishing trips, political events and meetings during fieldwork in 2011, 2012 and 2017

Type of activity	Amount
Fishing trip	13
Meeting among coastal Tabasco's fisher leaders	2
Meeting among coastal Tabasco's fishers and their leaders	1
Meeting between Pemex, subcontractor company and seven fisher leaders	1
Protest organized by Tabasco's fisher leaders against the government and oil companies	2
Meeting on temporary employment to fishers between two government officials and 19 fishers	1
Consultory hearing on fishing and aquaculture law at Tabasco's parliament	1
Elections-related political events	2

ANNEX 3

Division of labour with regard the two co-authored articles of the PhD thesis

I Quist, L.M. and Nygren, A. 2015. Contested Claims over Space and Identity between Fishers and the Oil Industry in Mexico. *Geoforum* 63: 44–54.

The article is based on research data collected by both authors. The theoretical ideas of the article were developed as a joint exercise. Each author analyzed her part of the research data. The article was written together by both authors.

70 per cent of the work was carried out by Liina-Maija Quist and 30 per cent by Anja Nygren.

Liina-Maija Quist

Anja Nygren

II Quist, L.M. and Rinne, P. accepted; forthcoming. The Politics of Justification: Newspaper Representations of Environmental Conflict between Fishers and the Oil Industry in Mexico. *Environmental Values.*

The article is based on ethnographic data collected by Liina-Maija Quist and newspaper articles collected by Pia Rinne. The article was written by Liina-Maija Quist, with comments to early drafts by Pia Rinne. 90 per cent of the work was carried out by Liina-Maija Quist and 10 per cent by Pia Rinne.

Liina-Maija Quist

Pia Rinne

6.1. A young cooperative fisher going shrimp fishing in his father's boat

I

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Contested claims over space and identity between fishers and the oil industry in Mexico

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ABSTRACT

This essay examines neoliberal forms of resource governance and emerging struggles over control of sea space between coastal fishers, the para-statal oil industry and government authorities in the State of Tabasco, Mexico. The analysis focuses on the changing mechanisms of resource governance and networking related to contested claims over rights to offshore space. The study is based on material collected during ethnographic field research in Tabasco in 2011–2014. By linking a post-Foucauldian approach to governmentality with a Deleuzian perspective on networks, our research examines resource governance as a socio-political arena, constructed in negotiation between multiple governmental, private and civil society actors, including heterogeneous groups from local populations. The study demonstrates how hybrid techniques of resource governance lead to fishers' socio-spatial displacement, marginalization in the fields of political representation and subjection to ideas of aquaculture entrepreneurship. The ensemble of private regulation and governmental control provides a venue for drawing fishers into clientelist practices of governing while it diffuses questions of responsibility. These modes of governance fragment the fishers' efforts to mobilize politically, making them rely on less visible networks of contestation shaped by heterogeneous fishing groups, with varying access to resources and political representation. Recent transformations in environmental legislation and the fishers' mobile tactics of networking may offer opportunities for them to reclaim their resource rights.

1. Introduction

Emilio, a political leader among cooperative fishers in Tabasco, launched my fieldwork with a serious lecture.[1] *On the second day of my three-month stay in his family, Emilio devoted three hours to explaining fishing politics in one of Mexico's most important oil-producing regions. He quoted excerpts from complex federal laws on fishing and cooperativism, and explained the problems fishers face with regards the implementation and enforcement of existing legislation. Though he quit school at the age of twelve in order to devote his time to fishing, he demonstrated an impressive fluency in the applicable law and a sound grasp of underlying politics.*

Emilio said the big change came when the federal government established a 15,900 km^2 marine zone of exclusion around oil platforms in the Gulf of Mexico in 2003. Access to the zone was limited exclusively to the oil industry to protect against terrorist attacks. The government is trying to persuade fishers to leave the sea and become fish farmers, though few have either the desire or the finances to leave fishing and obtain the land required for an aquaculture operation. Many fishers prefer sea fishing because it is what they are used to, though in search of fishing areas away from the oil rigs, they are traveling into riskier, less familiar waters.

Emilio's remarks on the role of legislation in the fierce competition for offshore space between fishers, the oil industry and government authorities in Tabasco opens up interesting viewpoints onto the interplay of power, politics and meanings in current contestations over neoliberal modes of governance of extractive industries. His comments also provide a point of departure for understanding a range of shifting forms of resource governance and contestation characteristic of large-scale extractive operations in the global South (Bebbington, 2012; Watts, 2011; Zalik, 2009).

In this essay, we focus on contested claims to space and identity within the context of hydrocarbon politics in Mexico. Placing the fishers, the oil industry and government authorities at the center of our inquiry, we seek the "how" of hybrid forms of governance in contemporary extractive regimes (Appel, 2012). The struggles over resource space in Tabasco are connected to the establishment of the zone of exclusion for all but the oil industry in the Gulf of Mexico in 2003. This declaration has restricted the fishers' access to their fishing grounds and forced them to travel further out to

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[1] This narrative is based on the first author's field diary notes during her fieldwork among the fishers on the Coast of Tabasco in 2011. The names of all the informants have been changed to protect their anonymity.

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sea, making their fishing operations more demanding and dangerous. At the same time, the Mexican para-statal oil industry is undergoing strong privatization and restructuration, and in order to boost production, it is extending drilling activities along the coast of Tabasco. The ongoing struggles for resource access are characterized by changing techniques of co-governance on the part of the government and the oil industry, fragmentation of the fishers' political mobilization and the fishers' shifting tactics of networking.

The main focus in our analysis is on the ways that techniques of governance and networks of contestation become shaped through the hybrid mechanisms of neoliberal oil governance. Inspired by Collier's (2009) Foucauldian approach, we examine how modes of resource governance based on conventional forms of authoritarian control (Watts, 2004b; Zalik, 2009) become combined with techniques of disentanglement and indirect governance (Appel, 2012; Himley, 2013). We argue that empirical analyses of neoliberal governance would benefit from more attention being paid to the complex articulations of different forms of governance. In Tabasco, within the shifting arenas of claim-making, for example, market-based mechanisms of governance are mixed with clientelist politics, producing a fuzzy ensemble. Fraternizing with the government enables the oil industry to relocate the responsibility for negotiating local fishers' demands for compensation to government authorities. Acting as mediator between fishers and the oil industry, government officials employ techniques that range from paternalist control to public–private regulation. At the same time, the oil industry is subcontracting foreign companies to carry out socially delicate oil exploration and drilling activities.

The challenges posed to local resource users by large development interventions have been analyzed in numerous studies on indigenous, peasant, human-rights and environmental-justice struggles against mega industrial development projects (e.g. Carruthers, 2008; Doane, 2005; Perreault and Valdivia, 2010; Scholsberg and Carruthers, 2010; Watts, 2011). Many of these studies focus on contestations in which local communities have succeeded in forming well-organized counter-movements with strategic links to transnational networks (Gustafson, 2011; Haarstad and Fløysand, 2007; Sawyer, 2004). Our study, in contrast, analyzes conflict over resource space and identity in a situation where local agendas are heterogeneous and counter-efforts have remained fragmented. As Auyero and Swistun (2009: 12, 7–8) note, these less visible struggles over resources and representation have received little attention in academic studies on social movements, despite their relative frequency.

In Tabasco, hybrid techniques of neoliberal governance tend to fragment the efforts made by local resource users to institute legal claims and political mobilization, making them seek resource access through everyday forms of connectivity. Here we link our Foucauldian analysis of governmentality with a Deleuzian approach to rhizomatic subaltern networks in order to analyze the fishers' networking (Escobar and Osterweil, 2010; Lenco, 2014). The fishers' endeavors in the contestation are mediated by their engagements with the sea space and through the asymmetrical relations between fisher leaders and entrepreneurs like Emilio, small-scale, licensed fishers and unlicensed, informal fishers, who have no legally acknowledged position from which to negotiate with the oil industry. Through ethnographic inquiry into the ambiguous forms of governing within the shifting oil regime and the fishers' everyday strategies of contestation, we seek to offer insights into the less visible faces of power (Nuijten, 2004: 210) within the situated contexts of neoliberal governance.

The following section presents post-Foucauldian theorizations of resource governance, combined with theoretical ideas of everyday contestation through rhizomatic networks. The third section explains the context and the methods of the study. In the fourth section, we move to analysis of the hybrid government-corporate strategies of resource governance, followed by the fifth section's examination of the fishers' fractured attempts at political contestation. The sixth section provides conclusions concerning the contested claims of corporates and communities to resource governance characteristic of neoliberal extractive operations today.

2. Governance, politics and fragmented networks

Emilio's portrayal of the struggles over the occupation of the Tabascan offshore touches on important themes in the current discussion of discursive strategies, political games and identity codifications in the competition between extractive industries, government institutions and local resource users for access to resource space (Hatcher, 2012; Perreault and Valdivia, 2010; Watts, 2004a). Recent studies on governance have redeveloped Michel Foucault's concept of governmentality to better capture the processes of privatization, deregulation and self-management involved in neoliberal modes of governance and subject-formation (Collier, 2009; Ferguson, 2010; Rose et al., 2006). Within this discussion, Collier (2009: 99) proposes an analysis of governance that makes visible the diverse ways in which techniques and styles of reasoning are combined and become complex modes of governing. Such an approach seeks to reveal neoliberalism as a "heterogeneous space, constituted through multiple determinations, and not reducible to a given form of knowledge-power." Our study follows this line of thinking by tracing the mentality of governance in the hybrid ensemble of discourses and political practices through which the governing of the sea space and fishers' subjectivity is being reformulated in Mexican oil politics.

In his Foucault-inspired analysis of conflicts over oil extraction in Nigeria, Watts (2004a: 199) conceptualizes oil governance as a "complex" that constructs "differing sorts of community," with "differing sorts of identities, forms of rule and territory." This perspective of multiple actors, identities and spaces offers an interesting angle for examining relations between the oil industry and local communities. Furthermore, Watts (2004b: 55) suggests that examining the logic of both rule and unrule and thereby the "perhaps *ungovernable*" spaces of oil politics is crucial for a more detailed understanding of oil governance. Correspondingly, Li (2007a: 277) notes that an analysis of governing that goes beyond the "conduct of conduct," can provide important insights into processes and experiences "that cannot be reconfigured according to plan."

Exploring what remains unexplained in oil politics by the mentality of governance is crucial especially because, as Mitchell (2011) notes in his analysis of oil and democracy, the material qualities of crude oil, as well as the investments and technologies required for its transformation into a global commodity, make oil extraction highly vulnerable to disruption. For this reason, the oil industry seeks to organize its production into spatially isolated operations, separated from the social observation and political pressure of civic movements (Zalik, 2009). By appearing to remove itself from local social conflicts, the oil industry obscures the links between global projects of resource appropriation and local experiences of resource exclusion (Appel, 2012; Ferguson, 2005).

These dynamics call for detailed analyses of how the strategies and techniques of governing are implemented in particular times and places, and of their fragilities and fractures, as well as of ambiguous negotiations and contestations between differently positioned subjects (Li, 2007b; Nuijten, 2004). In Mexico, the economic and symbolic power of Petróleos Mexicanos (Pemex) in national politics, together with the melange of legacies of clientelism and new techniques of neoliberal governance, color the

globalizing oil sector's relationships with local populations (Martínez Laguna, 2004). The tightened regulation of the Tabascan offshore will probably impact on prevailing tensions over resource space between the oil industry and heterogeneous groups of fishers in the near future.

In addition to resource management through legislation and public regulation, oil regimes deploy other techniques to legitimize their operations and restrict the access of local populations to resource spaces. In their research on hydrocarbon governance in the Gulf of Mexico, Breglia (2013) and Zalik (2009) demonstrate how – apart from legal actions and state-policing in the privatizing offshore – the Mexican government's welfare interventions are encouraging fishers to become entrepreneurial aquaculturists. Correspondingly, Sawyer (2004), Breglia (2013) and Himley (2013) show how corporations are seeking to transfer local claims to resource access from formal political arenas to voluntary programmes of corporate social responsibility and community development. These actions are aimed at obscuring the issues of environmental and social responsibility involved in extractive operations and hiding the inherently political nature of the corporates' actions.

These hybrid mechanisms of resource governance raise many questions regarding contemporary struggles over resource access and cultural identity. Scholars inspired by Deleuzian approaches to networks have taken up the concept of the rhizome to refer to new forms of subaltern networking. Escobar and Osterweil (2010: 201) emphasize the changing connections and mobilizations within subaltern networks, suggesting that a rhizomatic perspective helps to convey a sense of that which is not "pure opposition or resistance" but yet escapes control. Lenco suggests (2014: 139) that a Deleuzian approach encourages the examination of emerging tactics of contestation within contexts of social change, in a world where "uncertainties have replaced regularities."

Detailed analyses of rhizomatic ways of networking may provide insights into the logic that characterizes connections among heterogeneous groups of marginalized people in contexts where institutional strategies of resource governance increasingly limit their livelihood options and political tactics. In Tabasco, intensified control of the sea space by the government and the oil industry has pushed fishers to deploy less visible tactics of contestation among the different groups. The fishers' mobile networks in offshore "taskspaces" (Ingold, 2000: 195–198) and ambiguous political arenas are keys to understanding their tactics of everyday resistance. Connecting post-Foucauldian ideas of governmentality with Deleuzian notions of rhizomatic networks, we examine the political arenas of oil and fishing not simply as spaces of authoritative intervention, but as constructed through diverse claims by actors in dissimilar positions (Büscher, 2010; Mathews, 2009). Empirical analyses of the conduct of conduct in struggles over resource access and identity can provide valuable insights into the hybrid rules and regulations, and fragmented tactics, characteristic of shifting forms of resource governance in today's extractive industries.

3. Studying Mexican fish-and-oil politics

Coastal Tabasco contains a mixture of mangrove wetlands, coconut plantations and dozens of fishing villages. Oil pipelines break up the verdant landscape and turquoise sea. The 190-km-long coastline includes the major towns of Frontera, Paráiso and Sánchez Magallanes and many small villages that are home to altogether approximately 7000 fishers (Fig. 1); about half of them are unlicensed (*pescadores libres*).[2] Fish and oil are tightly interwoven in the lives of the coastal population, most of which is directly or indirectly engaged in at least one of these activities.

The Tabascan fishing communities are far from homogeneous. There is considerable intra- and inter-household differentiation according to age, gender, livelihoods, social status and political position. Many of the unlicensed fishers work under more or less casual arrangements for wealthier, license-holding fishing entrepreneurs (*permisionarios*). Sea fishing, is not a part of women's everyday life; rather, they specialize in catching crabs, cleaning the catches of incoming fishing boats or working in collective fish-farming operations (Saury Arias, 2010). Women also assist their husbands and other male relatives in riverine and coastal fishing. The fact that the state authorities no longer grant fishing licenses to new fishers but instead are trying to promote onshore aquaculture, causes many difficulties for small-scale fishers, who do not have the legal status nor the resources required for aquaculture. In this situation, struggles over identity and political representation revolve around the issue of who is a "real fisher": one that practices fishing, or one that holds a fishing license.

The federal government actively promoted cooperative fishing from the 1940s to the early 1980s. During this time, it was relatively easy for coastal people to find work in cooperatives linked to the high-flying fish and shrimp industries. The cooperatives sold their catch to the state-owned company, Ocean Garden, which then exported the fish and shrimp to the USA. In the 1990s, the Mexican government opened the fishing industry to private investment. With cuts in government subsidies, overfishing and Pemex's operational expansion, the shrimp and fish industries collapsed and, currently, Tabasco accounts for only 1.4% of national fish production (Saury Arias, 2010: 43, 102). Meanwhile, the heterogeneity of fishers, competition over restricted resource space, and the large number of unlicensed, informal fishers who have limited political rights, has fragmented the political agendas of the coastal fishing communities.

Pemex, the eleventh largest oil company in the world and the third largest exporter of crude oil to the United States (US EIA, 2012), producing approximately 2.5 million barrels of crude oil a day, figures in the everyday life of fishing communities in multiple ways.[3] The Sonda de Campeche (Campeche Sound) in the Gulf of Mexico holds the giant complex of the Cantarell and Ku-Maloob-Zaap oil fields, which together account for 51% of Mexico's oil production (Pemex, 2013). Over 200 oil-production platforms and roughly 160 foreign companies operate in the Campeche Sound as suppliers. Since the establishment of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1992, the Mexican government has opened the energy sector to global investment and given transnational companies access to oil exploration and drilling under subcontracts with Pemex (Martínez Laguna, 2004). The new *Ley de Hidrocarburos* (Hydrocarbons Law) and *Ley de Ingresos sobre Hidrocarburos* (Hydrocarbons Revenues Law), created under President Enrique Peña Nieto's administration, allow Pemex to make licensing, production-sharing and profit-sharing contracts with private companies (DOF, 2014a,b). These reforms and the expansion of extractive operations to Tabascan coastal areas will considerably increase the oil industry's influence on the livelihoods and living conditions of the fishing communities in the future.

Land-based oil extraction began in Tabasco in 1949, eleven years after President Lázaro Cárdenas expropriated the oil industry from foreign companies (Zalik, 2006). Pemex launched a major development of Tabascan offshore oil reserves in 1977–1980 (Beltrán, 1988: 52). With the ramping up of oil production, local populations began to recognize the wide-scale impacts of the oil

[2] The first author's interview at the Secretaria de Desarrollo, 2011.

[3] Pemex, Statistics: "Producción de petróleo y gas", 2013.

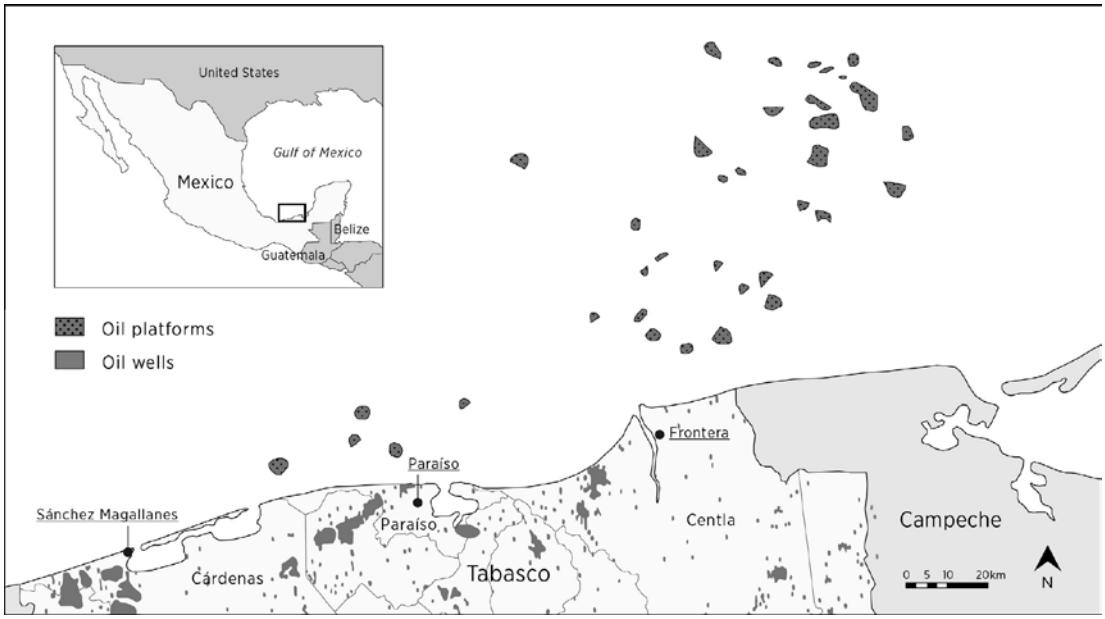

Fig. 1. Onshore oil wells and marine oil platforms situated in coastal Tabasco. The map includes coastal Tabasco's three major towns, Frontera, Paraíso and Sánchez Magallanes, situated in the municipalities of Centla, Paraíso and Cárdenas, respectively (adapted from UJAT (2006) and Saury Arias (2010: 217)).

industry on their living environment (Tudela, 1989: 248–254). Since the appearance of the industry in offshore waters, the fishers have reported on oil spills that have damaged their fishing equipment and caused fish death, and with the recent oil explorations along the coast, the fishers claim that the noise of the exploration boats is scaring fish away from their habitats.

Unlike the rapid transfer of production sites in many other global industries, oil production is difficult to move in cases of any kind of conflict because oil reserves are physically embedded and the investments required for extraction are high (Ferguson, 2005; Zalik, 2009). Consequently, the Mexican government imposed initial security restrictions on movements near oil installations in the late 1990s (Arias Rodríguez and Ireta Guzmán, 2009: 13) which were formalized under a 15,907-km^2 marine zone of exclusion around oil installations in the Gulf of Mexico in 2003 (Fig. 2). The zone was established under the federal legislation "Acuerdo Secretarial No. 117," based on the power of ejectment granted to the Secretaría de Marina (Naval Secretariat, SEMAR) (DO, 2003). This agreement prohibits any activity other than oil extraction within the zone. While the agreement was justified by arguments of preventing terrorist attacks and enhancing national security, one of its aims seems to have been to avert offshore social confrontation in order to ensure undisturbed oil production. Similar restrictions may also gain prominence close to the coastline as the oil industry plans to increase the number of coastal operating oil platforms in the traditional fishing waters of the local population from two in number to sixteen in the coming years.[4]

This study is based on empirical research into multiple actors. The first author carried out six months of ethnographic fieldwork among fishers, government and oil industry actors on the coast of Tabasco and in the state's capital, Villahermosa, in 2011–2012. During this time, she lived first with the family of a political leader among the fishers, and then with that of an unlicensed fisher. Participation in the fishers' lives provided insights into their daily activities, social networks and political strategies. This part of the study included 40 ethnographic interviews, dozens of informal conversations, and implementation of the methods of participant observation.

Both authors took part in the study of government and oil industry actors, which consisted of numerous interviews and participation in meetings and workshops with the representatives of government institutions, the oil industry and fishers. The first author conducted 35 interviews with government authorities and representatives of the oil industry in 2011 and 2012. The second author carried out 21 interviews with government authorities and representatives of the oil industry from 2011 to 2014, also participating in two workshops organized for representatives of global oil companies in Mexico: the first entitled "Conflict management in the oil production areas" and the second, "Corporate responsibility in the oil industry." Participation in these workshops offered valuable information about oil industry perspectives on resource governance, including market-driven codes of conduct and programmes of community development.

Both authors reviewed relevant government documents, development plans concerning the oil industry and fishing, the oil industry's social responsibility reports and other public documents. Access to the complex networks of Mexican fish-and-oil politics was highly challenging and required considerable flexibility in our field research. The sensitivity of the research topic, and the politically tense relations between the oil industry, government authorities and different kinds of fishers, required multi-faceted negotiations and efforts to build trust and protect the informants' anonymity. These conditions also required strategies to secure the safety of the informants as well as our own. To improve the reliability of our argumentation, we carefully cross-checked information from the different sources of research data, a process that included multiple comparisons: between different interviews we

[4] The second author's interview with Pemex staff person, 2011.

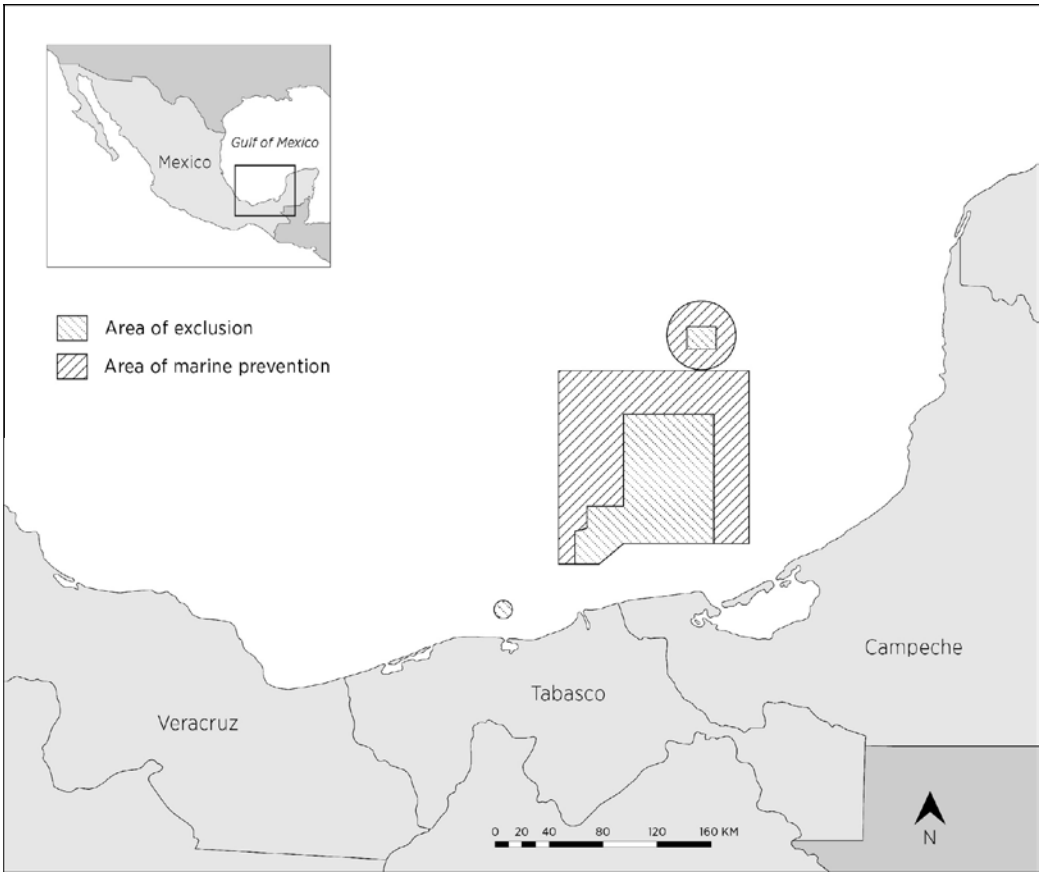

Fig. 2. The marine zones of exclusion and prevention established in the Gulf of Mexico in 2003. *Source of information:* Second author's communication with PEMEX, 2015.

had each conducted; between the sorts of information that the informants gave us on different occasions; and between the information gathered through interviews and that of participant observation and complementary documentary material.

4. Governing the sea

4.1. New negotiation procedures

In the late 1990s, foreign oil exploration subcontractors appeared in Tabasco's coastal waters, causing restrictions on the fishers' seagoing movement. In a news story by the regional newspaper *Presente*, published January 11, 2002, two fisher leaders questioned the curious anonymity of the *buques exploradores* (exploratory boats) in the port authority's notification about the geophysical studies for oil deposits. The fishers said the notice did not identify the company subcontracted for the exploration, yet ordered fishers to stay out of its way. Within a year, the zone of exclusion was established.

At the time of our fieldwork in 2011, another transnational geophysical subcontractor for Pemex was exploring oil deposits along the coastline of Tabasco. Yet the strategies for informing the public were virtually unchanged from those of ten years earlier. The notification, distributed by the port authority, included detailed information about the coordinates and timetables of exploration and the Pemex logo, but the authority to contact in case of inquiries was the port officer. There was no mention of the company in charge of exploration.

These information control measures form part of the socio-spatial regularization of the Tabascan sea space and the fishing population in the context of intensified integration of Mexican oil resources into global networks of production and trade. The conditions of a "petro-state" (Watts, 2005: 384), in which the Mexican government received about $50.3 million in oil revenues in 2010, accounting for a third of the government's tax income (Pemex, 2010: 9, 16–17), link the Mexican political economy into volatile global oil markets and geopolitics. In the hybrid forms of resource governance, legislative measures and government-led techniques of oversight are combined with market-based incentives and the mechanisms of public–private co-governance. Together these techniques mediate the fishers' access to resource space and reformulate their institutional representation as resource users who are economically inefficient and/or politically threatening.

Government agencies play an important role in these hybrid forms of governance. In our interviews, both Pemex and state government representatives noted that earlier forms of personalized settlements between fishers and the oil industry created an

"industry of claim-making" ("*industria de reclamación*"), whereby fishers purportedly blamed Pemex for diverse harms and Pemex settled the claims in order to secure its oil production operations. Under current arrangements, the state-level Secretaría de Energía, Recursos Naturales y Protección Ambiental (Secretariat of Energy, Natural Resources and Environmental Protection, SERNAPAM), acts as a mediator in negotiations over compensation for environmental harm, economic loss and social disturbance caused by the oil industry to the fishers. Both the oil industry and government representatives considered these new procedures to be much more transparent than those in place earlier which, they claimed, allowed room for clientelist deals. According to these interviewees, compensation claims are now dealt with more uniformly and equitably under the supervision of state authorities. As an official in SERNAPAM explained:

> This new approach was initiated in response to an industry of claim-making, where people claimed compensation from Pemex and Pemex paid out for whatever damage. Now we're trying to get rid of this kind of social tutelage. We're setting norms for coordinated actions, so that people are able to negotiate in coordinated fashion with governmental agencies.
>
> [Second author's interview at SERNAPAM, 2012]

Using state authorities as intermediaries is an important part of the oil industry's indirect form of governance as, in compensation negotiations in particular, it makes it difficult for fishers to identify who is responsible for what and to whom. Yet, while officially emphasizing transparency and social responsibility, in practice the oil industry and government agencies are engaged in various sorts of extra-legal reparation and informal horse-trading in order to control fishers' contestation tactics. The aim of the techniques of public–private co-governance is to give the appearance of the government being in control of resource regulation, thereby forestalling fishers' political mobilization.

The same holds true with regards the regulation of the fishers' access to offshore areas. The zone of exclusion, situated 30–40 km off the Tabasco coast, includes a marine "area of prevention" of 15,907 km^2 through which the "fast transit" of fishing boats is allowed (Fig. 2). The actual "area of exclusion" of 5794 km^2 is closed to all traffic except that involved in oil drilling (*DO*, 2003). Prior to the establishment of the zone of exclusion, Tabascan fishers enjoyed some of their richest hauls around the oil platforms, which act as artificial reefs and attract fish. Furthermore, the platforms provided shelter for the fishers during heavy storms and the opportunity to exchange fresh fish for other foodstuffs with platform workers. Despite the official discourse of national security, cordoning off the marine area seems to be a preventative act to manage potential social conflict with fishers, especially in light of the platforms to be established close to the Tabascan shore.

Government/industry co-governance has, however, not been an entirely smooth road. Pemex often blames state institutions for sustaining conventional relations of patronage, while state authorities accuse Pemex of avoiding its responsibility and using state officials as shields in fending off fishers' accusations. With regards the zone of exclusion, Pemex managers argue that Pemex, as a private company, has nothing to do with the federal government's national security legislation. Indeed, Pemex representatives assert that the federal government established the zone and it is the Mexican Navy that is mandated to enforce legal regulations therein. As a high-ranking Pemex official conceptualized the issue:

> Earlier we didn't have so many problems with the fishers. It was mostly claims for damage to their nets. Now they accuse us of invading their fishing areas. They ask us, 'Who gave you the authorization to displace us?' But it was the federal government that signed the agreement restricting fishers' access. Pemex didn't intervene; it was the National Security [Forces].
>
> [Second author's interview with a Pemex staff person, 2011]

Like other global majors, Pemex also increasingly engages in market-based, self-regulatory programmes of corporate responsibility which, together with various forms of compensation, aim to mitigate tensions over the offshore space with local fishing communities. Yet even here, it is the government officials that often facilitate these programmes, thereby enabling the oil industry to carry out its activities with limited direct engagement with local people. Moreover, as the programmes are based on voluntary agreements, they are largely beyond public scrutiny. Like other transnational corporations, Pemex prefers private codes of conduct and voluntary agreements, which provide more flexible, first-party verified regulatory schemes than the law and mandatory regulation.

The increasing use of subcontractors both in oil extraction and in managing the oil industry's relations with the local communities plays a strategic role in the new forms of governing the offshore resource space and the coastal fishing population. For a company with a past record of having managed some of the local people's claims through questionable deals, relocating the business of community relations increasingly to foreign subcontractors disentangles Pemex from earlier practices. At the same time, it allows Pemex to follow the lead of other global oil companies in establishing regulated relationships with local communities (Breglia, 2013: 174–177). The recent production agreements require companies contracted by Pemex to dedicate 1.5% of their budget to community development, while the use of subcontractors also serves to blur lines of responsibility. As is common in private norms of regulation, Pemex does not take responsibility for the actions carried out by its subcontractors; while the transnational subcontractors often shift the blame for unsuccessful programmes or unaccomplished goals to Pemex.

In 2011–2012, Pemex was carrying out a community development programme in coastal communities together with one of its subcontractors. In this programme, which had a budget of approximately $1.7 million, the companies donated 150 two-stroke motors and 100 equipment kits for navigation, safety and motor repair to licensed fishers. In November 2011, at a meeting held to decide on procurement of the motors that included representatives of the fishers, Pemex and the subcontractor, a fisher leader "welcomed" the participants with an aggressive rant blaming Pemex for decreasing catches. The fishers then accused the oil industry of delaying the procurement. The subcontractor nervously assured the incensed fishers that the motors would arrive eventually, but that it all depended on Pemex. Finally, the meeting calmed down when oil industry representatives started to ask the fisher leaders about the exact type of motors they were requesting. The course of the meeting seemed to follow a script that was familiar to the actors involved. Both the fisher leaders and the oil industry representatives knew that after the fisher leaders had been able to perform the role of an intrusive claimant, the oil industry would buy them off with clientelist techniques.

The community development programmes offer the oil industry an arena for political negotiation on compensation for lost marine space, even though representatives of the oil industry have not officially admitted to their having such a role. The new techniques provide the oil industry with a venue in which to continue clientelist arts of governance, while the subcontractor, by taking up the role of facilitator, diffuses questions of responsibility. While the programmes seem to prevent fishers' frustration at the lost resource space from developing into an organized protest movement, everybody realizes that the programmes as such can hardly compensate the fishers for their restricted resource access and the changes in their way of life.

4.2. Transforming sea fishers to fish farmers

With the objective of identifying alternative livelihood strategies for fishers constrained by the restricted access to offshore space, a new negotiating body, *la mesa pesquera*, was established in 2009, comprising representatives of fishers, Pemex, state-level SERNAPAM and federal-level Secretaría de Gobernación (Secretariat of the Interior, SEGOB). Although it lacks legal authority, all representatives considered it an important step toward greater transparency on the part of what amounts to a fortress-like oil company that had never previously sat at round-table negotiations with fishers. The major activities of the body have been the formulation of the oil industry's social responsibility programmes and the establishment of a fund to provide loans for fishing and fish farming to licensed fishers.

The fishing license is the key to attaining status as a legally constituted fisher with official resource rights and a politically recognized fisher identity in Mexico. As the federal Secretaría de Agricultura, Ganadería, Desarrollo Rural, Pesca y Alimentación (Secretariat of Agriculture, Livestock, Rural Development, Fisheries and Food, SAGARPA) no longer issues fishing licenses to new fishers, the fishing communities are increasingly divided into those with a license and thus with access to the compensation paid by the oil industry, and those without and thereby denied the opportunity to negotiate with the oil industry. Due to the political and symbolic power associated with the fishing license, licensing is a heated issue between the government and the fishers, and it remains intense despite the government's efforts to present licensing policy as a neutral, technical affair, in which restriction is considered to "discipline" fishers to prevent over-fishing. As the following excerpts illustrate, a strict division between legally constituted, licensed fishers and uncontrollable, clandestine fishers characterizes the discourse of government agencies and the oil industry on the regulation of sea space:

> The fishers operate in the federal zone. It's a real chaos. The only way to create order there is through licenses.
>
> [First author's interview with a government official, 2011]

> We only work with organized fishers. We don't work with *pescadores libres* because anybody who wants to can suddenly decide to identify himself as a fisher. . .*Pescadores libres* are not legally recognized fishers.
>
> [Second author's interview with a Pemex official, 2011]

In arguments to support increasing control over offshore access, Tabascan state officials also used categorizing discourse that problematized fishers as reliable citizens and responsible resource users (Lund (2011: 889). Fishers were "impossible to negotiate with" because they were unwilling to cooperate among themselves. They were said to be cunning, dishonest and greedy. This discourse resembled what Sawyer (2004: 76) records when an indigenous Ecuadorian activist mimics the discourse of an oil company's chief executive on the people of Amazonia: "We can't work with those *indios*. They can't even agree on what they want. They are always fighting." In arguments for and against particular identities and forms of living, categorical labels of class, race and ethnicity are often used to justify differentiated access to resources (Povinelli, 2011; Lund, 2011). By presenting the fishers as the culprits of their own social abandonment, government officials and oil-industry representatives justify tightened access to the offshore space.

As a way to manage the conflicts related to the fishers' loss of resource access and endangered sea-fishing livelihoods, the government has proposed "rural development" programmes based on the idea of transition to aquaculture. Through these "conversion programmes" (*reconversión pesquera*), the government aims to transform sea fishers into entrepreneurial fish farmers, assuring fishers that "what they catch in the sea, they can equally produce onshore" (Arias Rodríguez and Ireta Guzmán, 2009: 3). One of the government's arguments for promoting fish farming has been to protect key Mexican fish stocks from overexploitation. This discourse obscures the oil industry's offshore expansion as the main reason for the fishers' displacement and attributes decimation of local fisheries to fisher indifference, thereby making fishers appear responsible for the conflicts over sea space. According to coastal fishers, the shift to aquaculture would serve to ensure exclusive access to the sea space for the oil industry.

In 2011, the Fideicomiso del Fondo de Reconversión Pesquera (Fund to Support the Conversion of the Fishery of the Mexican Gulf, FIFOPESCA) provided six million pesos to Tabascan fish farmers to invest in the cultivation of tilapia, oyster and shrimp. However, fishers must first comply with a long list of requirements such as environmental-impact assessments and water-use accountings before they are eligible to apply for state funds. Only 10% of the currently registered 140 cooperatives and private license-holders, and none of the approximately 3000 unlicensed fishers in coastal Tabasco are involved in aquaculture. The fish-farming programmes tend to favor better-off producers who have the capacity for long-term investments, while, in our interviews, few fishers saw fish farming as a realistic proposition for small-scale operators. In addition to lacking land, possession of which is a legal requirement for fish farming, fishers found that raising fish in ponds was a very different way of life and thus not an easy transition for those who have made their living from the sea since childhood. Nevertheless, many fishers struggle to meet the requirements for funds from these state-led development projects that carry the hopes of gaining extra income through paternalist engagement with the state. Indeed, Nuijten (2004: 223) calls this form of governmental power a "hope-generating machine." With the restricted access to the sea, many Tabascan fishers are being persuaded to seek the support provided by the state to encourage them to become entrepreneurial fish farmers.

For the fisher leaders who saw the government-promoted shift to aquaculture as a way to control fishers' access to the offshore areas, this strategy became palpable in December 2012 as the Commission of Agriculture, Forestry and Fishery in the Congress of Tabasco invited them and the representatives of aquaculture organizations and universities to discuss the proposed *Ley de Acuicultura y Pesca del Estado de Tabasco* (Tabasco's Aquaculture and Fishing Law). Most of the bill's 39 pages were devoted to the regulation of aquaculture, with few references to sea fishing. When participating in the forum, it became obvious for us that the approximately one hundred forum invitees were merely witnesses to decisions that had already been made. Considering that the law had been written primarily with fish farming in mind, two fisher leaders, including Emilio, offered critical comments on the bill while tactically deploying paternalist discourse in describing themselves as "*pescadores simples*" ("simple fishers"). The two leaders noted that legal requirements demand that officials arrange consultative workshops with fishers in each municipality when preparing such legislation. As it was too late for such hearings, the leaders demanded a few strategic reformulations to the bill in order to ensure that the legislation would also serve as an instrument for sea-fishing policy. Seven days later, the Mexican Congress approved the original bill with no changes.

In general, the hybrid modes of resource governance combine legal measures and public regulation with market-based incentives and techniques of indirect governing, thereby obscuring the role of the oil industry in the re-regulation of the fishers' resource space. Fishers' political claims for resource access are located under the oil industry's voluntary community-development programmes and government-mediated, extra-legal negotiations. Such modes

of governance work toward political displacement of fishers as legal subjects, meanwhile urging them to become responsible resource users and entrepreneurial fish-farmers. The portrayal of fishers' displacement from the sea as inevitable in order to assure national security and environmental sustainability makes the economic incentives offered by the oil regime to shift fishers' from the sea to the land appear almost like genuine charity.

5. Networks, mobility and contestation

5.1. Legal claims and fragmented political mobilization

Although the juncture of the chocolate-colored waters of the deltaic Grijalva-Usumacinta River with the turquoise clarity of the Gulf of Mexico long provided rich hauls for coastal fisher folk, the fishers claim that once abundant sharks have now all but disappeared because of noise from oil extraction. Also gone are the shrimp, the tortoises and the crocodiles. For several decades, the fishers and the oil industry have co-existed offshore with varying degrees of success but, even with the oil industry's appropriation of the sea space, fishers continue to consider themselves as rightful "*dueños del mar*" (masters of the sea).

During our conversations, the fishers' political leaders frequently pointed out the significance of statutory mechanisms such as the legal requirements for environmental impact assessments and public hearings in their struggles for resource access and livelihoods. Within the changing resource governance, legal measures and clientelist relationships represent a familiar framework to fisher leaders; a game whose rules they know. Emilio's calls to use the framework of the law in reclaiming fishers' right of access to the sea were based on the strong social precedent in Mexico to recognize customary resource rights in legal and political practice. Correspondingly, his comments at the above-mentioned Forum on the Aquaculture and Fishing Law were based on his knowledge that public hearings are mandatory when planning significant changes in the fishers' legal status.

Most fishers, however, are considerably less fluent in the law and statutory process than their political leaders, a disparity that enhances the opportunities of leading fishers to engage in political dealings with government officials and the oil industry. Some governmental fishing authorities recently suggested that with the increasing number of oil platforms near the Tabasco coast, fishers should be supported to engage in deep-water fishing or marine aquaculture between the oil platforms. These plans enjoyed support from fisher leaders, although it was clear that both activities would require considerable capital investment. As many of the fisher leaders are commercial fishers, however, they calculated that in the implementation of such policies, they might have better resources and access to government subsidies than other fishers. On the other hand, most small-scale and unlicensed fishers, who need to sell their labor through unequal contracts to commercial fishers or engage in informal fishing, have a less advantaged position. These differentiations further fragment the efforts for political mobilization in already divided fishing communities.

The power mediated through fisher leaders and their clientelist ties to political parties acted as a reference point by which fishers calibrate their understanding of the reconfiguring regimes of oil extraction. From the fishers' perspective, the gradual transformation of the sea space from a contested commons to an enclave assigned exclusively to the oil industry appeared to take place under a mandate of government and the then-ruling *Partido Revolucionário Institucional* (PRI), while the opposition *Partido Revolucionário Democrático* (PRD) was portrayed as an important supporter of fisher attempts to mobilize. According to fisher leaders, negotiation with political parties continues to be crucial in the struggles over resource space in order to avoid the risk of governmental repression. This holds true even with shifting forms of governance through which a diversity of governmental, private and civil society actors is engaged in resource governance.

In terms of fishers' contestative efforts, the establishment of the zone of exclusion in 2003 precipitated a series of protest movements which they organized in alliance with NGOs, journalists and politicians from different parties. At the demonstrations, the fishers invoked their right to the sea as a resource space by referring to their cultural identity as sea fishers, and nationalist concerns that the zone of exclusion had been established to secure US energy needs. In 2004, the Fishers' Federation, supported by 3000 coastal fishers, blocked a highway and demanded that the government abolish or at least relax restrictions on the zone of exclusion. As an alternative, the fishers proposed a variety of compensatory mechanisms, including expansion of the licensed offshore fishing area, aid for marine aquaculture, subsidies for deep-water fishing, economic support or employment for fishers on the oil platforms.

Under the heightened pressure, the federal government called off the restrictions and increased the budget for the Tabascan fishing sector from the previous year's 6 million pesos to 25 million pesos. As a result of these strategic concessions, open political confrontation withered. Once the situation was calmer, the exclusion-zone restrictions were soon reinstated, with oil industry and government representatives both noting that SERNAPAM-mediated meetings were the sole legitimate forum for airing fisher claims. According to the fishers, their open resistance was co-opted through political horse-trading between the oil industry, state authorities and their own leadership:

> Fidel: A man rose up to lead our resistance, and there was discussion that the problem would be solved. This man has gobs of money now.
>
> José: They silenced him.
>
> Matias: They gave him money; they silenced him.
>
> Fidel: He is rotting away in money! And the struggle did not achieve anything.
>
> Ana: Nothing...because they paid the fishers and the struggle dropped off.
>
> [First author's group interview with fishers, 2012]

The ambiguous processes related to restricted resource access and the increased involvement of foreign companies in oil extraction was a subject of discussion among fishers, for whom the actual power relations in oil politics were unclear. During our fieldwork, fishers usually portrayed the Pemex-state complex as the operator in charge, referring to transnational subcontractors simply as "*compañías*" ("companies"). This choice of terminology was not because the fishers did not know the subcontractors' names; rather, it expressed the fishers' concern about the legitimate masters of the sea under the new power configurations. By referring to them as "*las compañías*" the fishers highlighted the subcontractors' facelessness in their co-operations with Pemex to transform the sea space from a contested commons to a restricted enclave controlled by the Navy for the exclusive use of the oil industry. In this situation, the actual names of subcontracted companies had little relevance.

The public image of oil production as an environmentally contaminating and socially disruptive activity has made the global oil industry a special target of transnational environmental, human-rights and social-justice movements in recent years (Perreault and Valdivia, 2010; Watts, 2011). The environmental–social disaster resulting from the explosion on a British Petroleum-owned offshore drilling platform in the Gulf of Mexico in 2010 strengthened the position of transnational advocacy

networks seeking greater responsibility from the oil industry. These networks have recently developed strategic ties with various indigenous, peasant, environmental and social justice movements in Mexico (Guzmán Ríos, 2009: 78–86).

Pemex, however, as a para-statal company has, until the ongoing energy-sector privatization, enjoyed national jurisdiction and sovereignty which has to a certain degree protected the company from becoming a target of transnational protest movements. Moreover, in accord with the nationalist discourse, protest movements are often presented in public as counterproductive activities that impede the efficient utilization of the country's hydrocarbon resources. Since small farmers, fishers and trade unions organized a wide-scale political movement, called Pacto Ribereño, against the oil industry in Tabasco in 1976–1983, Pemex and the government have used strict measures to control such mobilizations. The techniques employed have combined legal measures, economic compensation and political repression, including imprisonment for political leaders (Guzmán Ríos, 2009). Given the fact that oil is one of the principal sources of national wealth and revenue for Mexico, and an emblem of symbolic power in national politics, Pemex expects strong government support in controlling protest movements.

Overall, the heterogeneity of the fishers' livelihoods and identities and the hierarchical power relations between different groups of fishers, as well as between fishers, fisher leaders, government authorities and oil industry representatives create multiple, and in themselves contested, communities within the coastal fishing areas. These conditions mediate the prevailing strategies to render the offshore resource space and the fisher population governable. However, while the ambiguous recognition of different categories of fishers by government authorities and the oil industry fragments the fishers' efforts to organize their political struggles, the fishers' rhizomatic networks constitute spaces beyond effective control (Watts, 2011) where the fishers seek to formulate mobile tactics of everyday contestation.

5.2. Tactics of mobility and endurance

Beyond clientelist co-opting and fragmented political mobilization, the fishers' networks of everyday connectivity mediate their relations to the sea as a taskspace, and their tactics for dealing with the hybrid forms of neoliberal governance. Unlicensed fishers, in particular, create spaces for escape beyond institutional apparatuses of control, weaving their everyday forms of resistance into their efforts to continue unrestricted utilization and free movement in the marine environment. As Saury Arias (2010: 46) notes in his study of Tabascan fishing communities, the only economic activity that has persisted in the coastal areas of Mexico through successive economic crises and political turbulences is the "silent," but consistent, presence of fishing. Paraphrazing Povinelli (2011: 78), this silence is "not about sitting quietly... waiting for the wizard to appear, or hanging out with the doorkeeper of law waiting for permission to enter." It is a space where the fishers' rhizomatic ties operate, a field of in-between-ness, located between what is now and what is imagined to become possible (Escobar and Osterweil, 2010).

These attributes of mobility and everyday endurance are embedded in the fishers' sense of freedom and self-reliance when operating in the immense, unpredictable sea, many kilometers away from life onshore. For sea fishers, the offshore space is embedded in a cultural logic of risk, survival and masculine values of physical force, self-reliance and freedom (Saury Arias, 2010). These experiences, along with the constant uncertainty of catching enough fish, are reflected in an unlicensed fisher's comment:

> You have to be patient if you want to be a fisher. Even though fishing is something wonderful, it is always about the uncertain chances of being hit by miracle.
>
> [First author's interview, 2012]

The sea is a space where fishers' embodied knowledge of the environment mediates their sense of self and social alliances. At the same time, these rhizome-like connections provide the fishers space to withdraw from and reinterpret the restrictive forms of resource governance. A typical three-day fishing trip involves traveling beyond the zone of exclusion to waters 40–100 km from the coast. Three or four men share a 5 m, often roofless, fiberglass boat, to catch red snapper, porkfish and sea bream with nets and long-lines under demanding conditions. The fishers' rhizomatic engagements offshore, that escape the governing gaze of the oil industry and the government, resonate with the fishers' view of their right to the sea as an "unbound" environment, as well as their way of life as mobile sea fishers. The spatial restrictions related to the zone of exclusion divide fishers increasingly into those with the resources and courage to travel to risky offshore spaces far from the oil platforms and those forced to compete within the scarce and overused coastal resources. As one unlicensed fisher, who sold his catch to a fishing entrepreneur, explained about traveling beyond the zone of exclusion:

> I like being a fisher and being out at sea. This is what I've grown to do. I just returned from a fishing trip to seventy nautical miles from here...What I don't like is that we have to go further and further each time. One travels out there without knowing if one will return.
>
> [First author's fieldnotes, 2012]

In another interview, a cooperative fisher who, due to the offshore restrictions, had stopped long-distance fishing and was fishing along the coastline and in the river, commented:

> ...now they are also here, on the fishers' zone in the river. Pemex's supply boats bump into us as we go out to fish.
>
> [First author's interview, December 2011]

As an everyday form of resistance, some fishers flout the law and frequent oil platforms anyway. Although policing of the zone of exclusion is under the Navy's jurisdiction, Pemex's high-tech capabilities and infrastructure play a crucial role in zone surveillance. Pemex is usually the one to inform the authorities about a zone incursion, while the Navy carries out the policing operation. Breaching the zone carries a fine of 200 pesos per violation, and if a fisher is caught three times, his boat is confiscated. Besides being necessary for survival, however, everyday operation in "*la zona de los pescadores*" ("the zone of the fishers") – as one of the unlicensed fishers called the Gulf – is a tactic used by the fishers to stake a collective claim to the sea space and their fisher identity and demonstrate their freedom. According to the fishers, the endangering of their livelihoods and the questioning of their identity as sea fishers amidst the aggressive expansion of the globalizing oil industry cannot be simplified to an issue of economic compensation; it is also a question of social justice and environmental equity.

Fishers' desires for their needs to be better considered in terms of resource governance are also reflected in the ways licensed fishers engage with the oil industry's community development programmes. As an everyday form of protest against the unwillingness of the oil company to recognize their resource rights, the fishers reinterpret the programmes to better suit their needs. In the above-mentioned programme, where Pemex and its subcontractor donated two-stroke boat motors, many fishers promptly sold their new motors and invested the money in something they regarded as more important. In order to ensure that fishers were

complying with the programme rules, oil industry representatives criss-crossed the coastal communities to inspect whether the motors were still in the beneficiaries' possession. Some fishers heeded the advice of fisher leaders who warned their constituents not to sell their motors until after the inspection; others planned to go out and buy used cars, gadgets or other items with the money. The fishers' resistance to the oil industry's defining their needs seemed to be well-known among Pemex officials who, in the course of an interview, inquired of us whether fishers had already begun selling the donated motors. Similarly, the fishers played along with state efforts to transform them into fish farmers. In order to obtain governmental subsidies, many fishers posed as environmentally sound, enterprising, potential farmers even if few of them actually considered fish farming a viable alternative to sea fishing.

Meanwhile, as the oil industry and the federal and state governments are tightening the fishers' access to the sea, recent changes in environmental legislation at the federal level may provide new opportunities for the fishers to stake collective claims for environmental damages caused by the oil industry. The *Ley de Acciones Colectivas* (Law on Collective Actions), which went into force in 2012, enables groups of at least thirty persons to raise class-action claims for environmental harms caused by the oil industry. A group of fishers and small-scale farmers from the interior of Tabasco, supported by environmental and human rights NGOs, has already used the law as a basis for suing Pemex, its subsidiaries and the involved government institutes for damages caused to the environment and local livelihoods (Asociación Ecológica Santo Tomás, 2013; IPS, 2013). If coastal fishers are able to meet the high burden of demonstrating oil-derived environmental harms and verifying that those harms are the cause of reduced fish catches, the case could bolster the fishers' efforts to regain their rights to the sea space and livelihoods as sea fishers. Within the globalizing oil industry and the shifting forms of resource governance, the fishers' struggles for a fair distribution of the resource space and institutional recognition of their perception of the sea as a taskspace and a living sphere depend on their opportunities to create efficient networks for contestation at multiple scales.

6. Conclusion

This essay has analyzed the hybrid forms of governance that characterize the oil industry's operative expansion in the coastal and offshore areas of the Gulf of Mexico, and the involved struggles over resource access and identity between sea fishers, the oil industry and the government. Building on post-Foucauldian approaches to governmentality and Deleuzian perspectives to rhizomatic subaltern networks, the study has shown the shifting forms of resource governance as intersections of dispersed claims and contestations by actors in dissimilar positions. Our attention to the politics of, and power over, resource space and identity in neoliberal contexts of resource extraction has been inspired by recent calls for more careful consideration of the "how" of the conduct of conduct and the complexity of contestations in the hybrid conditions of neoliberal governance (Appel, 2012; Collier, 2009; Li, 2007a; Watts, 2011).

The legislative restriction of fishers' access to their former fishing grounds has been complemented by a series of governing techniques that ultimately shape resource governance into a fuzzy ensemble. This hybridity manifests itself in the intertwining of clientelist deals and paternalist control of political representation with public–private co-governance and techniques of obscuring responsibility in the regulation of resource access and in the corporate programmes of community development. The federal government's centrality in managing the legislative changes that concern marine resources, and the state authorities' strategic role as intermediaries in the negotiations between the oil industry and the fishers over compensations for environmental harm and social disturbance caused by the oil industry, send contradictory messages to the fishers. On the one hand, the government appears as a paternal authority, in control of the neoliberal governance shift; while, on the other, strategic co-governance allows the government, Pemex and subcontractors to shift responsibility for restricted resource access and inadequate compensation back and forth, making it hard for fishers to distinguish which agency is in charge of responding to which of their claims.

Overall, the hybrid modes of governance work to displace the local fishers from the sea space and weaken their position in the arenas of political representation, while attempting to persuade them to stay onshore and become fish farmers. In such a situation, where half of the practicing fishers are officially defined as not having a right to that identity, the fishers' mobilization is limited to rhizomatic networks and everyday forms of resistance. Through these efforts, fishers seek to counter the drastic changes in their resource access and in their way of life as sea fishers and to make what they can out of the community development programmes designed by the government and oil industry. The fisher leaders' tactics of political mobilization draw essentially on the strategic use of legislation, clientelist relationships with the government and the oil industry, and earlier experiences of government repression. At the same time, the fishers' mobility in the elusively governable offshore taskspace works as a means to escape from control and demonstrate tactics of everyday resistance (Lenco, 2014). Nevertheless, with the growing regulation of the sea space and fishers' resource rights, these rhizomatic networks may in the future come under more effective surveillance.

In recent years, extractive industries in many parts of Latin America have deployed corresponding techniques of resource governance to render large resource spaces governable. Neoliberal discourses and programmes of corporate social responsibility have, for example, been combined with clientelist co-opting and indirect governing in the Peruvian Andes (Himley, 2013) and Ecuadorian Amazonia (Sawyer, 2004). Most studies of these phenomena examine situations where local resource users have succeeded in collectively mobilizing against extractive industries. However, understanding contemporary struggles over resource governance demands that we also consider the less visible, less governable and yet common spaces of contestation and counter-struggles for political representation that have received relatively scant academic attention (Auyero and Swistun, 2009; Horowitz, 2011; Perreault and Valdivia, 2010).

The value of combining a post-Foucauldian approach to governance with a Deleuzian perspective of rhizomatic networks lies in the assistance offered by the resulting framework in tracking a detailed picture of the multifaceted claims and contestations. Extending Foucauldian inquiry from the logic of governance to the "how" of actual practices of governing, of negotiations and struggles over power and of local resource users' interpretations of the shifting forms of resource governance, provides valuable insights into the contextual variation and everyday complexity of neoliberal governance.

In Tabasco, the forthcoming extraction of coastal and offshore oil reserves will increase the presence of platforms and submarine tubes in areas used by the local fishers and thereby probably tighten the competition for resource space. The recent changes in Mexican environmental legislation and transnational networks of environmental and social justice may provide new opportunities for Tabascan fishers to reclaim their resource rights in the Gulf of Mexico. However, even in this case, the access to the Gulf's seafood resources may primarily be gained by a few economically and politically well-positioned fishers.

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II

The Politics of Justification: Newspaper Representations of Environmental Conflict between Fishers and the Oil Industry in Mexico

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ABSTRACT

Media representations of environmental conflicts between companies and communities play an important role in influencing ideas about the rightful exploitation of natural resources. This article examines local newspapers' representations of fishers' claims over resource access in a conflict between fishers and the oil industry in Tabasco, Mexico. Our analysis is based on articles from two newspapers dating from 2003–2004 and 2007–2012, and ethnographic data from 2011–2012. Drawing on Boltanski and Thévenot's theory of justification, discussions on patrimonial collectivities, and studies of media and social movements, we suggest that Tabascan newspapers reshape fishers' claims over resource access by portraying fisheries and oil as patrimony. Being an ambivalent vocabulary for the defence of space and locality within a conflict over natural-resource enclosure, the newspaper narratives of patrimony both invoke subaltern concerns and reconstrue state authority and local hierarchies. Furthermore, the newspaper narratives are interconnected with fisher leaders' narratives, in particular, while misrepresenting different fisher groups' arguments, and thereby contribute to political division among the fishers as a whole.

KEYWORDS

Fishers, justification, media representation, oil industry, patrimony

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1. INTRODUCTION

This study examines newspaper representations of sea fishers' claims during a conflict over access to marine areas in Tabasco, Mexico. Since the early 2000s, intensified exploration and extraction of hydrocarbons in the Gulf of Mexico have caused continued tensions between the oil industry and sea fishers. At the same time, the Mexican government has opened the energy sector to global investment, and has given transnational companies access to oil exploration and drilling via subcontracts with Petróleos Mexicanos (Pemex), which until recently was a parastatal company. One of the major controversies between the fishers and the oil industry has concerned the increasing restrictions imposed on fishers' access to former fishing areas that, since 2003, have been reserved for the exclusive use of national and foreign oil-industry actors. According to fishers, the intensified oil extraction causes increasing environmental harm, jeopardising the livelihood of coastal populations who derive their primary income from fishing.

Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) suggest that the moral valuations on which we usually draw when justifying claims in environmental conflicts have universal characteristics: a justification goes beyond merely stating a particular viewpoint, to claim that it is both relevant for the common good and generalisable according to the criteria of a shared moral value. They further suggest that in contemporary conflicts, people generally employ justifications that can be divided into seven different value orders or 'worlds' that emphasise the 'civic', 'domestic', 'market', 'industrial', 'inspirational', 'fame'-related or 'ecological' value of the environment (Lafaye and Thévenot, 1993; Thévenot et al., 2000).

As many have noted, however, Boltanski and Thévenot derive these categories from works by Western political philosophers without discussing why and how they apply to non-Western contexts (Honneth, 2010; Lounela, 2015). Furthermore, they have also generated critique through their claim that justification is exclusively about value-based argumentation drawing on the principle of 'common humanity'. Honneth (2010) suggests that the theory of justification should more comprehensively take account of the social structures of moral values and the related links between values, interests and power. Blok (2013), Latour (1998) and Lounela (2015) argue that Boltanski and Thévenot's tendency to universalise the principle of common humanity results in disregarding both the plurality of existing value-systems and the diverse ways in which the environment is involved in the constitution of both humanity and values. Consequently, the 'civic' value order, which is based on equality and solidarity, 'rises' above the other six value-orders as a kind of super-category. Our study draws inspiration from these critical re-examinations, from the attention paid by communication studies (Gitlin, 1980; Nygren, 2006; Sobieraj, 2010) to the role of power relations in how media outlets represent groups that

could be described as subaltern, and from assessments of the diverse value judgments accommodated by media narratives.

We approach claims over space and resource-access by examining environmental dispute coverage in the years 2003–2007 and 2011–2012, in two Tabascan newspapers, *Presente* and *Tabasco Hoy*, which – rather unusually for newspapers – draws mostly on subaltern accounts. These periods marked important phases in the conflict. To strengthen the analysis, the study also combines ethnographic data on fishers' quotidian arguments about resource access from 2011–2012. Our analysis involves situated forms of what Boltanski and Thévenot refer to as domestic, industrial, civic and ecological justifications, paying special attention to their unequal newsworthiness. Furthermore, we combine Boltanski and Thévenot's ideas with Ferry's (2005) theorisations of patrimonial collectivities, to show how newspaper coverage of the conflict is based on a continuity of representations of oil and fisheries as patrimonial resources. Ferry (2005: 10) characterises patrimony as a 'highly charged "root metaphor"' and a 'vital feature of Mexican social, political and economic life', commonly used to make claims over resources and gain access to loci of power.

The situated, ambivalent meanings of the 'world of patrimony' resonate with Boltanski and Thévenot's (2006: 164–178) domestic world, which encompasses hierarchical relations, family and tradition. In Tabasco, however, representations of both oil and fisheries as patrimony involve the highly unequal valuation of the respective patrimonial collectivities: the nation as the patrimonial collectivity of petroleum, and the local fisher community as that of fisheries resources. Furthermore, patrimony involves particular moral valuations of resources and social relations, which, at the same time as they defend the local within processes of shifting resource governance, provide justification for existing power-relations and enable unequal possibilities for appropriation by different subaltern groups, thereby fragmenting the fishers' political struggle. Boltanski and Thévenot tend to pay less attention to these kinds of close linkages between values and power, central in analyses of justification, media and struggles over resources.

As Luhtakallio (2012: 149) writes, subaltern groups often have closer relations with local media than they do with national media, and in Tabasco's coastal areas some fisher leaders had collaborated with *Presente* and *Tabasco Hoy*'s field journalists. The leaders considered local outlets to be an important venue for political activism. While leaders and fishers had little voice in resource politics or the national newspapers, they were the primary source for news about the oil industry and fishing in their local media. Furthermore, the latter made important contributions to the imaginings and re-imaginings of community and common resources available to local readers (Luhtakallio, 2012: 149). But although the local media provided fishers with one of their few public arenas for putting political pressure on the oil industry and the government, it also actively reshaped their stories. Conversely, although industry

representatives appeared in national newsprint coverage of environmental disputes, they were virtually invisible in the Tabascan newspapers, along with NGO representatives and scientists.

The fishers' frequent appearance in the news raises questions about the representativeness of their arguments. Generally, studies of social movements and the media tend to focus on the ways the media categorise and misrepresent movements, resulting in subaltern groups thereby failing to gain 'quality' media coverage that is 'advantageous' (Amenta et al., 2012; Díaz González, 2013; Hopke, 2012; Sobieraj, 2010). Many studies have shown how media representation of subaltern claims is linked to the wider framework of power relations, influencing the newsworthiness and public persuasiveness of different arguments in conflict situations (Gitlin, 1980; Earl and Rohlinger, 2012). Both Awad (2014), however, in a study of subaltern media tactics in Argentina, and Cottle (2008), in an analysis of how the contemporary media have reported dissent, have suggested that media coverage is seldom exclusively misrepresentative, and that even marginalising representations of subaltern groups may produce important vocabularies for subaltern claims.

In this article, we suggest that the Tabascan coverage highlights the limited discursive resources that the media provides to heterogeneous subaltern groups, reinforcing existing group hierarchies and working to divide subaltern politics. Popular ideas of patrimonial relations between the Mexican state, natural resources and the family, which derive from the state's post-revolutionary rhetoric (Ferry, 2005), are reproduced through what we call narratives of patrimony in *Presente* and *Tabasco Hoy*, and are also employed by the fishers' political leaders in presenting claims concerning the environment, livelihoods and protection within the conflicts over space. Here we understand 'narratives' to be stories reflecting the politics of storytelling about common resources; they are construed from 'available and sanctioned' elements, influenced through institutionally located power (Ezzy, 1998: 247). Our study shows how the narratives of patrimony provide unequal opportunities for different fisher groups to make public claims within familiar social relations of hierarchy and dependency, and how, in their daily lives, practicing fishers also present diverging ecological arguments over access to the environment by emphasising their fisher identity and their embodied experience of the sea space.

Our article unfolds in six parts. Following this introduction, we examine theoretical approaches to justification, through discussions of patrimony, media and social movements. In the third and fourth sections, we discuss the socio-political context of Tabascan news, and our methodology and material. The fifth section offers an analysis of newspapers' uses of the notion of patrimony in representing the resource conflict, and shows how ideas of patrimony align with various everyday arguments put forward by fishers. This is followed by conclusions about the connections between newsprint representations and fishers' claims, and their roles in struggles over Tabascan natural resources.

Through analysis of news and ethnographic data, media representations of environmental conflict are conceptualised as a complex political arena providing heterogeneous subaltern groups with unequal opportunities to present moral demands, carve out a political agency and influence decision-makers.

2. MORAL AND POLITICAL (ECOLOGICAL) GRAMMARS OF RESOURCE ACCESS IN LOCAL NEWSPAPERS

Newspaper coverage of the conflict over Tabascan offshore space illustrates the discursive asymmetries involved when subaltern groups compete with strategically-important national industries (Coronil, 1997; Pereira da Silva and Rothman, 2011; Watts, 2001). Recent studies have demonstrated that the notion of patrimony as an inalienable common resource, passed from generation to generation and binding together state and people, provides a limited vocabulary for subaltern movements in defence of local natural resources (Breglia, 2013; Ferry, 2005; Thévenot et al., 2000). Thus, Ilyin (2015: 44) suggests that contemporary social research should employ 'patrimony' as an analytical instrument to identify patrimonial characteristics as they are variably understood and employed with regards to the 'common good of generations', rather than merely taking its meaning for granted. In response, our study tracks the situated meanings and justificatory uses of the concept within the conflict over access to the Gulf's resources, and how it is connected to other kinds of value judgments concerning the environment's worth.

Ferry (2005: 13) and Ilyin (2015: 46) suggest that the notion of the *inalienability* of common resources plays a central role in constituting patrimonial collectivities and power relations. Ferry writes that in Mexico, this ideal encompasses both patrimonial resources and objects such as tools which take part in producing patrimony, thereby securing the continuity of patrimonial collectivities; this is a crucial notion that actors often invoke when making claims to alienable resources. Furthermore, in Mexico, patrimony is discursively imbued with the ability to designate collectivities, present the origins of existing power relations, and explain how and why they should be maintained (Ferry, 2005: 11; Breglia, 2013: 97–99). Consequently, as Breglia (2013: 14–15) writes in her study of the relations between the oil industry and fishers in Tabasco's neighboring state, Campeche, ideas of a 'patrimonial sea' provide contradictory discursive resources for different actors because they legitimate access to patrimonial assets for both the coastal fishing populations and the national collectivity as a whole.

This draws attention to limitations within the justification theory, which derive from an insistence that we examine justification exclusively in the context of value judgments (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006: 37), thereby eliding justification of interests and arrangements of power. This distinction becomes

unproductive, as politically- and economically-privileged groups also deploy ideas of patrimony and collectivity, and with flexibility. Studies of conflict coverage also draw attention to the links between values, interests and power in public claims, noting that subaltern groups in opposition to industry seldom achieve the media visibility and kind of representation they seek (Pereira da Silva and Rothman, 2011), often being downplayed, excluded or criminalised by the media (Behrman et al., 2012; Ehrnström-Fuentes, 2015).

Latour (1998) and Blok (2013) have critically examined the suitability of the justification theory's 'ecological' value order in postcolonial contexts. Latour (1998) argues that in order to break from its humanist and modernist legacy, the ecological world should be conceptualised as a non-modern, political-ecological category that acknowledges the environment's value in terms of the 'uncertain connections' between humans and nonhumans. Blok (2013: 504, 507) suggests that, when taken together, the ideas of Boltanski, Thévenot and Latour highlight ecology as a value order of 'divergent senses of ecological worth', inviting political ecologists to attend more closely to the possibility of alternative ecological configurations. This is a perspective connected to that of Tabascan fishers, in which the uncertain connections with the environment are fundamental, but in which, nevertheless, no political-ecological agenda is advocated. In this study, we therefore examine the ecological value order not as a super-category, as suggested by Latour, but as a value order comprising multiple understandings of the environment's worth.

Finally, as highlighted by subaltern politics studies, claims arise as a condition of politics itself (Ferguson, 2015; Jung, 2003), and those concerning resource access in the Tabascan newspapers suggest that the media visibility of local groups is conditioned by the dominance of the moral and ideological language of patrimony. In the following sections, we examine representations of fishers' arguments with regards to existing arrangements of power, the role of the media in resource politics, and the meanings of the narratives of patrimony for local groups who seek a meaningful place within existing social relations. When linked with discussions of patrimonial collectivities and the political role of the media in environmental disputes, the theory of justification enables us to examine such disputes as discursive struggles between competing environmental valuations, which, together with state and oil-industry politics, works to create divisions among different subaltern groups.

3. STUDYING TABASCAN NEWSPRINT MEDIA AND THE CONFLICT OVER ACCESS TO THE GULF'S RESOURCES

Newspapers continue to be a critical resource for social movements seeking publicity (Earl and Rohlinger, 2012). In Latin America, especially outside of metropoles, the mainstream media has a central role in circulating narratives

about social issues, and influencing public opinion (Kitzberger, 2014). In Tabasco, the middle- and upper-class inhabitants (in particular) actively follow newspapers (Rinne and Nygren, 2015); within the fisher communities, political leaders closely follow *Tabasco Hoy*, while fishers rely on the radio and TV for local news.

Our news analysis involves two Tabascan publications. *Presente* is one of the most popular local newspapers, aligned with the centrist-oriented Partido Revolucionario Insitutional (PRI), which led the Tabascan state government from 1959–2012, and also dominated Mexican national politics from 1929–2000 (Rinne and Nygren, 2015). The circulation of *Presente* in 2011 was about 25,000. *Tabasco Hoy* is a highly popular tabloid newspaper. Its director, a prominent Mexican businessman, has links to the social-democratic Partido de la Revolución Democrática (PRD). The printed circulation of *Tabasco Hoy* was about 30,000, with 45,000 people reading its electronic version. Mexico has a free press, but the media operates under several constraints both due to increasing violence toward journalists, and dependence on government funding which affects the news coverage of *Presente* and *Tabasco Hoy* and most other regional newspapers.

Coastal Tabasco's fishing communities are differentiated by livelihoods, social status and political position. There are at least 7,000 sea fishers;[1] half of them are unlicensed (*pescadores libres*), while the other half consists of approximately 2,700 co-operative fishers and 800 license-holding entrepreneurs (*permisionários*). In addition, many people move between fishing and farming according to the time of year. Many of the unlicensed are former co-operative fishers, half of whom now work under more or less casual arrangements for the wealthier *permisionarios*, while the rest are informal, independent fishers.[2] The proletarianisation of the fishing communities, the competition over restricted space, and the large number of unlicensed fishers who have limited political rights, all inevitably fragment the fishers', the entrepreneurs' and the fisher leaders' political agendas.

Pemex, the eleventh-largest oil company in the world and the third-largest exporter of crude oil to the United States (US EIA, 2012), has an active presence in the everyday life of the fishing communities. The giant Sonda de Campeche (Campeche Sound) complex in the Gulf of Mexico accounts for 51 per cent of Mexico's oil production (Pemex, 2013). Since 1992, the Mexican government has opened the energy sector to global investment, and has given foreign companies access to oil exploration and drilling under subcontracts with Pemex (Martínez Laguna, 2004). In 2003, the government imposed security restrictions on movement near Gulf of Mexico oil installations, in a

1. These estimates are from the first author's interview with a fishing offical in 2011 and official statistics from 2009 (INEGI, 2010).

2. This is based on Saury Arias' (2010: 111) estimates of the number of fishers in Frontera, one of Tabasco's three coastal fishing towns.

marine zone of exclusion measuring 15,907 km^2 established under the federal legislation 'Acuerdo Secretarial No. 117' (DO, 2003). This bans everyone except oil-industry operatives from entering the zone. While the agreement was justified as terrorism prevention and security enhancement, one of its aims seems to have been to avoid offshore social confrontation, in order to ensure undisturbed oil production (Quist and Nygren, 2015). Recent legal reforms (DOF, 2014a, 2014b) made under President Enrique Peña Nieto's administration, and the expansion of operations to coastal areas with the participation of foreign subcontractors, will considerably increase the oil industry's influence on the living conditions of fishing communities in the future.

Our study combines news analysis with ethnographic analysis, to provide insights into how ideas of patrimony figure in the dispute over resource access both within the media and in the everyday political arenas, and how the media representations and fishers' everyday justifications are interconnected (Krzyżanowski, 2011). While our main attention is given to the media, the ethnographic fieldwork among fisher leaders and fishers contributed significantly to developing a nuanced understanding about the pronounced hierarchies between fisher leaders and fishers, and the ways in which leaders' and fishers' narratives overlapped and diverged. The fieldwork especially helped to identify connections between media representations and fisher leaders' claims, and to help us understand the central role that the leaders played in the construction of the narratives of patrimony. The ethnographic knowledge also enabled critical insights into the political agendas and strategies of all the actors involved in the conflict; these helped identify which perspectives the media favoured. Correspondingly, the media data suggests a continuity of narratives of patrimony throughout the years examined, giving us reason to infer that the fisher leaders' narratives of patrimony, identified in the ethnographic material, may also have a longer history. Overall, the rather unusual mode of combining newspaper and ethnographic data provided for a much more profound understanding of the role of the newspapers in the conflict than a reliance on only one set of data would have done.

The media material examined in this analysis consists of 213 articles: 87 from *Presente* and 126 from *Tabasco Hoy*, from the years 2003–2004 and 2007–2012. These years involved important political shifts that had an impact on the relationships between the fishing and oil industries, and on the thematic focus of news coverage. In 2003, the zone of exclusion was established, followed by frequent protests in 2004; from 2007–2008 onwards, the oil industry intensified offshore explorations, and from 2010, due to the decline of production at Sonda de Campeche, explorations increased along Tabasco's coastline in particular. The establishment of the zone of exclusion and the coastline explorations are both reflected in the peaks in dispute coverage in 2004 and 2010, and in a relatively high number of articles in 2011 and 2012 as well (see Figure 1). Content was gathered by reviewing the print and electronic archives of the

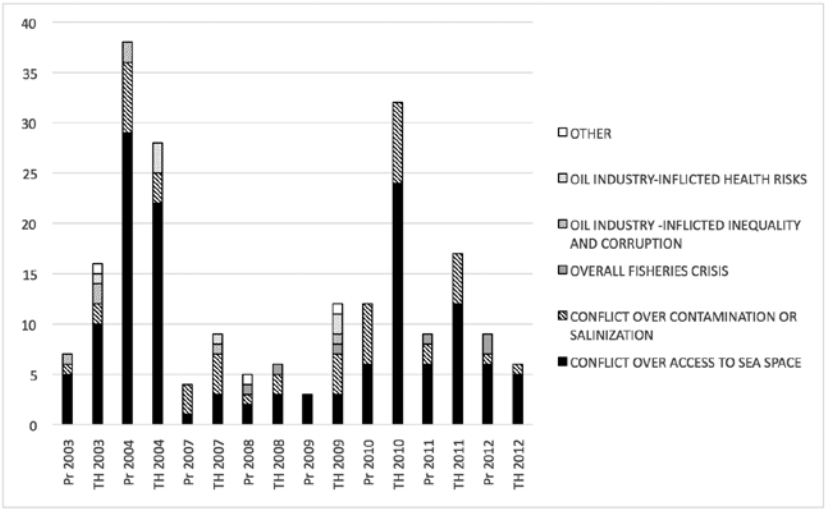

Figure 1. Frequency of main themes in articles in *Presente* (n = 87) and *Tabasco Hoy* (n = 126), between 2003–2004 and 2007–2012.

two newspapers, in the latter case employing Spanish keywords for fishing (*pesca*, *pesq*-), oil (*petrol*, *-eo*) and the oil company ('Petróleos Mexicanos', or Pemex). After examining the articles, those that discussed relations between coastal fishers from Tabasco and the oil industry were selected.

As the majority of the data focused on representations of fishers' perspectives, we focused on how the fishers' views were framed and on rhetorical justifications for fishers' resource access. We carried out a qualitative content-analysis of the articles by identifying the main themes, the news sources and the main actors, as well as the latter's claims and arguments (see e.g. Gorin and Dubied, 2011). Each article's main themes were identified from headings and subheadings, whereas the claims presented and arguments provided were identified from the entirety of the text. The articles contained either an explicit claim and a supporting justification, or involved a rationale according to which access to the Gulf for particular actors was justified. In the latter case, in order to identify a justification when there was no explicit claim, we paid attention to how the newspapers presented the fishers and the oil-industry or government actors, and the interrelations between the groups. We paid special attention to the journalists and news sources, and to the repeated publication of articles by the same journalists and sources. We also identified omissions of actors or themes.

The first author gathered most of the ethnographic material during six months of fieldwork in 2011–2012, spent in Tabasco's coastal areas and its capital, Villahermosa, among both its fishers and its government and oil-industry actors. During this time, she lived first with the family of a political fisher leader, and then with that of an unlicensed fisher, participating in their daily fishing operations, family lives and political activities. This involved participant observation, dozens of informal conversations, and twenty interviews with fisher leaders, entrepreneurial fishers, co-operative fishers and unlicensed fishers. Fieldwork also incorporated four interviews with journalists, three with government officials, two with oil industry actors and two with NGO representatives. The second author carried out four additional interviews with editors and journalists. Altogether, we interviewed four journalists from *Presente*, two from *Tabasco Hoy* and four other journalists who were either independent or worked for Tabasco's other newspapers.

4. THE ACTORS AND THEMES IN THE MEDIA FOCUS

In this section, we briefly examine the major social actors and themes in the newspapers, and how these were represented. We began our analysis by examining the social actors – news sources and journalists – involved in the news-making, finding a total of 493 sources in the 213 articles. Over half of the articles in both *Presente* and *Tabasco Hoy* (61.3 and 57.3 per cent respectively) were based on information from fishers, of which the largest groups were the leaders and other formal representatives (25.2 per cent in *Presente* and 27.3 in *Tabasco Hoy*) and licensed fishers (consisting of co-operativists and entrepreneurial fishers: 21.4 per cent in *Presente* and 22.7 in *Tabasco Hoy*). Unlicensed fishers had much less salience (6.7 per cent in *Presente* and 1.2 in *Tabasco Hoy*). The other source groups are available in Table 1.

When mapping the journalists, we found that 65.1 per cent of the articles whose primary sources were fishers had been written by only four field journalists, two from each newspaper. Furthermore, these journalists collaborated several times with the same fisher leaders and fishers. Thus a large part of the news-making had been carried out via long-term relationships between particular journalists, fisher leaders and fishers. The ethnographic data we collected also suggested that some journalists and fisher leaders had known each other for many years, and had collaborated.

The newspapers' conflict reportage involved testimony-type articles, which reported losses caused to fisheries by the oil industry, and more elaborate articles that presented both the fishers' losses and their related demands. The criticisms of the oil industry and the government were presented mostly through the construction of a categorical juxtaposition between socially- and politically-marginalised fisher groups and a morally-illegitimate yet powerful

Social actors	Presente (%) (n=163)	Tabasco Hoy (%) (n=330)
Representatives of fishers and fisher -campesino organizations	25.2	27.3
Cooperative fishers	15.3	19.7
Entrepreneurial fishers (permisionários)	6.1	3.0
Fishers (unspecified)	8.0	6.1
Unlicensed fishers	6.7	1.2
Residents of coastal communities	8.0	7.6
Fishmongers and other fish entrepreneurs	0.6	0.9
Representatives of research institutions, specialists	2.5	8.8
Representatives of federal institutions	8.6	6.4
Representatives of state institutions	2.5	2.1
Representatives of the oil industry	1.2	2.1
Politicians (fed. & state)	9.8	5.8
Representatives of the private sector (other than fishing)	1.8	3.9
Representatives of environmental and human rights NGOs	2.5	2.1
Others / no social actors	1.2	3.0
Total / fishers	61.3	57.3
Total	**100.0**	**100.0**

Table 1. The social actors used as news sources in *Presente* and *Tabasco Hoy* in 2003–2004 and 2007–2012.

and unpunished industry. Fishers were generally presented as either neglected and therefore in need of the oil industry's protection, or as irresponsible resource-users requiring control; they were also shown drawing on their subaltern position as a kind of a filial tactic. *Presente*, quoting a fisher leader, wrote that their complaints had 'never been successful, and all the claims we have made against Pemex are always deemed groundless. We will never win a dispute against this powerful company' (*Presente*, 25 July 2003). There is also a sense of inevitability in the way power relations are depicted, which, while certainly not completely misrepresentative of the actual state of affairs, reinforces images of the fishers' marginalisation. Yet at the same time, we suggest, fisher leaders and licensed fishers actively used the restricted position made available by a pre-established narrative repertoire to present their claims in the media (see Awad, 2014).

We divided the news themes into six categories (see Figure 1). The thematic focus of the articles reflected actual events such as seismic studies, large oil spills and the restrictions on fishers' access; the emphasis shifted between

these events during election years, when *Tabasco Hoy* gave considerably more publicity to the dispute over resource access. Furthermore, in *Tabasco Hoy*, during and prior to the municipal-election years of 2003 and 2009, news reporting was (more than usually) an arena of competing perspectives, while in *Presente*, it was more favourable to the government than it was outside the election period. The modes of representation and justification, however, did not vary dramatically over the years.

5. NEWSPAPERS, JUSTIFICATION AND POLITICS

5.1. Claims to patrimony

The specialty of the Tabascan conflict coverage was that while it drew on fishers' accounts of oil-industry-derived harm, it framed them as narratives of patrimony, and thus only ambiguously involved critiques of the industry. In this section, combining news analysis with ethnographic analysis, we show that this was possible because patrimony's ambivalence as a justification for claims to resource-access provided a moral grammar which partially invoked fishers' concerns at the same time as it reconstrued state authority and local hierarchies. By privileging fisher leaders' and licensed fishers' perspectives, and framing them in narratives of patrimony, the media actively reshaped the fishers' claims for regaining access to the Gulf fishing-grounds and receiving compensation for socioeconomic and environmental damage induced by the oil industry.

Crucially, the newspapers' generous attention to the fishers' claims through reference to the patrimonial value of fisheries made it possible for the papers to appear to promote the fishers' cause. At the same time, however, they devoted little critical attention to the larger framework of power relations that had an impact on resource access, especially through the judiciary, and they seldom employed investigative journalism to present evidence for fishers' claims. Instead, the narratives of patrimony comprised the dominant approach to justifying resource access; this meant invoking the fisheries' historical entitlement to space, the continuity of the patrimonial collectivity through family, the ideally inalienable realm of fisheries and related equipment, and relations of responsibility and protection. The debate about entitlement to space and resources, however, was conditioned by oil's privileged patrimonial value, and a prioritisation of the national collective (construed through oil) over the local collective (construed through fisheries).

The newspapers framed the fishers' claims to space by emphasising their historical entitlement to environmental resources, and by presenting the material world of seafood resources and fishing equipment as elements of a historically continuous and inalienable patrimony. 'The fishers were here before Pemex; for historical reasons we are entitled to attention and deserve protection', a

fisher leader was quoted as saying, in connection with his demand that fishing prohibitions around the platforms be annulled (*Tabasco Hoy*, 6 January 2007). Correspondingly, by making repeated reference to the material components of the work, including diverse fish species and fishing equipment, the newspapers gave meaning to the fishers' labour, and defended it as patrimony against the effects of the oil industry's expansion. '"The oil spills not only damage our equipment but also frighten the shoals of fish" … they [the fishers] have ceased fishing species such as black snook, common snook, king mackerel, snapper, jack and sargo, and are waiting to meet with Pemex' (co-operative fishers quoted in *Tabasco Hoy*, 21 April 2010). The mundane and material, yet inalienable, historically-embedded world of fishing contributed fundamentally to the discursive constructions of the endangered patrimony of the *hombres del mar*. From this perspective, the damage caused to fishing equipment was more than a financial loss, as it represented a fracture to patrimony as the idea of a collectivity's continuity.

The idea of continuity was also highlighted by references to the fisher family as a core unit of the patrimonial collectivity. 'This is unfortunately the only work our fathers taught us', one fisher leader was quoted as saying (*Tabasco Hoy*, 18 September 2004). Another article reported the decrease in yields since the introduction of the restrictions on sea traffic: 'The catch shrank seriously and fishing became unviable for the families that depended on it' (*Presente*, 3 February 2012). By making continuous reference to the family, the newspapers highlighted how the economic crisis in the patrimonial fisheries was a risk to the continuity of the way-of-life in coastal communities.

During fieldwork in 2011 to 2012, there were also often moments when fishers themselves employed patrimonial justifications for access to resources, although they mostly discussed patrimony in terms of the fisher co-operative as the patrimonial collectivity of labour. Both licensed and unlicensed fishers often talked with pride about the collective hard work, and yields (especially past) involved in co-operative fishing. The idea of co-operatives and their continuity also involved the family, as many co-operatives continued to consist of family members, while numerous fishers mentioned the power-games and corruption that, due to historical relations of government protection and control, were involved in co-operative politics.

As mentioned above, however, the language of patrimonial entitlements and responsibilities positioned the oil industry's patrimonial importance above the fishers. In the newspapers, fisher leaders themselves were often quoted as acknowledging the *paraestatal*'s privileged role as the 'motor' of the nation, as in this article:

> It is urgent that both Pemex and the authorities and fisher organizations sit down to analyse the situation of the fishing sector 'because we are not opposing the exploitation of hydrocarbons; we know it is our country's wealth, but it

> needs to be noted that we as a productive sector are also very necessary for the nation'. (*Tabasco Hoy*, 3 November 2003)

In 2012, as the conflict continued without any solution satisfying to the fishers, *Presente* wrote: 'fishers need the authorities' help, which is why they ask Pemex to be slightly wiser in this respect and to permit fishers to approach the platforms a little in order to gain better hauls' (*Presente*, 16 April 2012). Pleas like this appear to take the fishers' side by relying on their accounts, but meanwhile justify the oil industry's access to the sea space.

In everyday discussions during fieldwork, it was mostly fisher leaders who made arguments that connected with those of the newspapers. Generally, fishers acknowledged the bleak contradiction between understanding that the Gulf was, historically, '*la zona de los Pescadores*' (according to a co-operative fisher), while being forced to 'negotiate' access with Pemex (in the words of a fisher leader), which had taken possession of the sea in the name of the common good, offering community development programs as a form of clientelist compensation. Fishers were strongly divided, however, about the notion of patrimony being an acceptable justification for the disparity in resource access. Most fisher leaders saw that the conflict between the two patrimonies required negotiation instead of outright protest; according to one, negotiation and collaboration were the only viable options, because protesting carried the risk of incarceration. Another leader said: 'We want to hear what Pemex's proposal would be. We know that Pemex generates income for the country' (first author's interview, 2011). In a similar tone, a third leader said that the sectors 'need to work in harmony […] Petróleos Mexicanos has to be the fishing sector's ally, and in the zone where Petróleos Mexicanos is, there still are many fish species we can exploit but we need better ships. We need to have alliances' (first author's interview, 2012).

In quotidian discussions during fieldwork, most licensed and unlicensed fishers rejected the idea that the national interest justified restrictions on their fishing grounds, and authorised the state to define the sector's future. The very idea of patrimony, however, divided the licensed and the unlicensed fishers, as it provided them with unequal chances of belonging to the state-acknowledged collectivity. In order to maintain the official fisher identity that the unlicensed fishers lacked, licensed fishers often justified resource access by drawing on their ownership of fishing licenses and their related entitlement to state protection of their livelihood. To maintain access to the compensation schemes, the licensed fishers also mostly supported their leaders' attempts to negotiate with the oil industry instead of directly opposing it. In contrast, without political subjectivity to give them a voice, entitlement to subsidies from the government, or compensation from the oil industry, the unlicensed fishers were in the frailest position within the patrimonial collectivity. Consequently, their political support was the least valuable to the fishers' struggle. Meanwhile the fishers' leadership, caught between the demands of the licensed fishers and

state pressure for various forms of extra-legal negotiation, sought to maintain support from its constituencies despite restricted legal mechanisms to promote their political objectives.

5.2. The sea as patrimony, as resource and as identity

The newspapers also presented the fishers' proposals for solving the resource conflict. Mostly, they relied on a combination of patrimonial and industrial justifications, producing combined arguments that associated the securing of patrimonial continuity with a more efficient exploitation of resources. The fisher-federation leader's official proposal (below) to the oil industry, made during the height of the fishers' protests after the establishment of the zone of exclusion, demonstrates this clearly. The newspaper article involves three very different proposals, the first of which involves a patrimonial justification, while the second and the third involve combinations of patrimonial and industrial justifications:

> One of the [solutions] is that work be offered to fishers at Petróleos Mexicanos (Pemex) on the platforms, 'in order for the resource to keep flowing to the municipality, because if fishing is finished and fishers are given money, they will leave from here and the municipality will be left alone to collapse'. Another solution that we propose to the corresponding authorities would be 'the creation of fishing parks where each fisher would have their future secured' … [T]he third proposal would be that Pemex exchange three or four boats to a ship. (*Presente,* 26 March 2004)

The first of the above solutions, exceptional in the newspaper material, assigns worth to fishers through their role in keeping together a coastal municipality's patrimonial collectivity, and suggests that fishers can un-problematically become oil platform workers and thereby part of the more valuable national collectivity. The second solution alludes to both the patrimonial and industrial values of fisheries by referencing continuity ('each fisher's future'), and more efficient resource exploitation. The third solution also draws on an industrial justification and, although it does not contain explicit patrimonial justification, it is premised on the idea of fisheries' patrimonial continuity. Here, as elsewhere in the news coverage, the presented claims do not challenge the oil industry's entitlement to access the patrimonial sea, but rather assert that fishers are *also* important in making and sustaining patrimony and collectivity. The first proposal further highlights how the newspapers flexibly accommodate the ambivalent meanings of both oil and fisheries as patrimony, while attributing primacy to the oil industry. At the same time, it emphasises what the other two solutions also imply: that the question of access to fishing is about the collectivity's continuity. Finally, the combinations of patrimonial and industrial justifications show how a claim for space *per se* is not sufficiently

convincing, but that it rather requires additional explication of how resource exploitation should be rationally organised within the reduced area.

During fieldwork, many fisher leaders saw the possibilities implicit in developing offshore fishing and aquaculture into a more capital-intensive and efficient extraction of resources, but they did not actively push for changes. Rather, they considered increasing state support for large-scale aquaculture projects to be a potential threat to small-scale fisheries. In the everyday arenas of fishing, most fishers (and some of the leaders) thought that regaining resource access simply meant restoring the entitlement to fishing grounds integral to their cultural existence as fishers. This conception involved an ecological justification that, although close to ideas of patrimony, contrarily drew on the fishers' intimate, embodied experience of fishing in the offshore environment (Blok, 2013; Latour, 1998). Fishers expressed the ecological valuation of sea space when telling heroic stories of life at sea or sharing their knowledge of various marine species and their uses. Characteristic of the accounts was how they portrayed fishers within their sea environment, rather than discussing the world of patrimony and its associated ideas such as collectivity, co-operative labour, family and continuity. Whereas fisher leaders and licensed fishers often combined ecological with patrimonial justifications, the unlicensed fishers mostly judged the patrimonial world by drawing on the ecological one. Their conceptions of free movement in offshore space, away from co-operative politics and government surveillance, were expressed as constitutive of their fisher identity.

On the other hand, ecological justifications occupied almost no newspaper space, and were not articulated in the political claims made by fishers and their leaders to the oil industry. They also ran counter to the industrial and patrimonial justifications, which were more convincing in the context of enclosure and the maximisation of efficient extraction. This highlighted how the terms of political debate, both inside and outside the media, favoured particular moral arguments, and hampered the articulation in claims of experiences of identity (see Luhtakallio, 2012: 157–159).

5.3. Fairness in the vernacular and the question of the 'civic world'

Our analysis of the coverage also showed how the media portrayed ideas of fairness by promoting fishers' claims that the oil industry was socially and environmentally unjust, and by publishing their calls for governmental agencies to monitor and punish the industry. The following kind of argument appeared in both newspapers: 'Fishers have not received a solution to their rightful claim [that Pemex] admit and take its responsibility for thwarting [fishers'] livelihoods with oil spills' (*Presente*, 29 September 2009). Importantly, these ideas of unfairness mostly involved the breach of the oil industry's responsibilities, rather than the fishers' basic rights. Furthermore, their dismal accounts

portrayed the fishers as confronted with the impossible task of persuading an unpunishable industry to assume its patrimonial responsibility.

Similarily, the continuous coverage of appeals to governmental agencies showed that the newspapers acknowledged the government's important role in the conflict as well. The reporting, however, mostly involved denials by governmental agencies of the grounds for fishers' claims, or failed to mention any reply at all. *Tabasco Hoy* reported a cooperative representative's concern: 'The environmental authorities such as the Federal Environmental Prosecutor (PROFEPA) and the Secretariat of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection (SERNAPAM) declared the fishers' complaints unjustified and argued that the material [oil spill] did not cause damage to the environment nor to the fishers' (*Tabasco Hoy*, 16 February 2011). Furthermore, only a few articles drew on journalists' first-hand evidence, which consequently left the truthfulness of the fishers' claims to the reader's judgment. Often, then, these complaints, while ostensibly presenting ideas about (un-)fairness, actually undermined the fishers' own politics.

In 2010, however, two articles appeared on the conflict, one in each newspaper, which made an exception to the language of patrimonial responsibility by referring to legislation and rights. In a report on fishers' frustrations about the continued restrictions on sea traffic, the representative of the fishers was quoted:

> [W]e think we have been very pacific because the secretary of [the governmental agency] has up to a point helped us construct a negotiation project with Petroleos Mexicanos, but we also know it's necessary that the fishing sector demand its rights. … We demand respect for our rights and that Pemex keep its word. (*Presente*, 10 August 2010)

The fisher leader emphasised that despite reconciliation through clientelist agreements with Pemex, the question of resource access was fundamentally an issue of the fishers' basic rights, not one of negotiation. Yet even here, the argument was that Pemex ought to *respect* those rights; the establishment of the zone of exclusion had made it more difficult than before for fishers to use legal arguments.

In a similar vein, *Tabasco Hoy* published the outrage of two fisher leaders: 'Petróleos Mexicanos (Pemex) is able to trust in the protection of laws and agreements that ignore [fishers'] elementary rights to pursue development in a clean environment and benefit from natural resources' (*Tabasco Hoy*, 1 June 2010). This was the only time that the media explicitly argued that the law was against the fishers' fundamental rights to the environment and livelihood (though neither article mentioned the unlicensed fishers).[3] These justifications

3. Interestingly, Rinne and Nygren (2015) have noted that during the same year (2010), *Presente and Tabasco* began employing a rights discourse in reporting on flood governance in Tabasco. In the coverage of the conflict between the fishers and the oil industry, however, these references to rights remained an exception.

were, therefore, not purely ecological, civic or patrimonial, but a mixture of all three. They also suggested that rightful access to the environment and a fisher identity was not necessarily prevented by differentiated access for different fisher groups.

Whereas the newspaper representations of the conflict drew primarily on the accounts of fisher leaders and licensed fishers, unlicensed fishers gained considerably less media visibility, although a few articles presented arguments made by them that diverged from the patrimonial canon and contained elements of civic and ecological justification. *Presente*, for example, wrote about the concern of unlicensed fishers for 'the ecological damage and scarcity of diverse fish species' caused by 'subsoil explosions', adding that 'over 3,500 unlicensed fishers who are equally impacted by contamination are excluded from support by Pemex' (*Presente*, 13 March 2004).

In the everyday, during our fieldwork, since the legislation excluded half of the fishers, those with a license and an officially-recognised political subjectivity used both the law and narratives of patrimony to defend their groups' privileged resource access. This was, for them, a question of preserving human dignity and fisher identity for all fishers; however, radical ideas on extending fishing rights to unlicensed fishers were seldom presented. Although some licensed fishers did see themselves as defending unlicensed fishers, many disapproved of the relative 'freedom' of the *pescadores libres*, who in their view managed to evade the norms of co-operative labour, and often shifted between selling their labour to various licensed entrepreneurs without committing to any particular one. The unlicensed fishers themselves considered that they were unfairly denied representation, as well as the distribution of benefits from the state and the oil industry, and they made civic arguments supporting political subjectivity and redistribution.

Finally, the newspaper representations highlighted patrimonial entitlements and responsibilities, and downplayed the importance that fishers assigned the judiciary in determining resource access. In their quotidian arguments for fairness in resource distribution and political representation, the fisher leaders and licensed fishers presented claims that combined civic and patrimonial values, whereas unlicensed fishers used civic justifications about equality. The use of the various justifications by the media, fisher leaders and different fisher groups demonstrated, following Ferry's study (2005), how the narratives of patrimony dominated resource-access debates, and were implicated in sustaining the asymmetrical arrangements of power between the parastatal industry, local fisher leaders and fisher groups. The media provided its own interpretation of the conflict by presenting categorical images of the disputants, by downplaying the role of legislation and by privileging representations of fisher leaders while excluding those of unlicensed fishers. But the fishers' uses of civic justification did not, contrary to Boltanski and Thévenot's suggestions, place the civic world morally 'above' the other worlds. Rather, it offered one

important moral and political vocabulary among many that were active in the asymmetric power relations, while highlighting the fact that the notion of patrimony provided different classes of fishers with unequal opportunities for making claims to resources and to a place within social hierarchies.

6. CONCLUSIONS

In this article, we have argued that ideas of patrimonial resources and collectivities dominate Tabascan newspaper representations of environmental conflict between fishers and the oil industry. The narratives of patrimony provide contradictory discursive resources, allowing subaltern groups to present justifications for resource access, at the same time as reaffirming state authority in resource governance. By also drawing on ethnographic analysis of the competing justifications employed by different fisher groups in their everyday discourse, our study has shown how local newspaper representations work to reinforce existing divisions between subaltern groups by privileging certain perspectives. In order to make our claims, we have drawn upon our research on the representations of *Presente* and *Tabasco Hoy* in 2003–2004 and 2007–2012, as well as ethnographic data from 2011–2012, to explicate the working of patrimony within a context of enclosure.

The majority of the news articles analysed here portrayed fishers' arguments by presenting patrimonial justifications for their claims, particularly through references to fishers' historical entitlement to the Gulf environment, and to the valuing of labour through a hierarchical relationship between the national and the local collectives. By providing fishers with extensive media visibility through patrimonial portrayals, the newspapers appeared to promote the fishers' concerns while simultaneously legitimating the oil industry's resource access as a patrimonial entitlement. During fieldwork, fisher leaders themselves also employed the patrimonial justification, arguing that the expanding oil industry and fishers should share the Gulf space. But for the leaders, the oil industry's compensation schemes increased the pressure to acknowledge the patrimonial value of petroleum resources and engage in 'negotiation'. Contrary to newspaper framings, most practising fishers and many of their leaders drew on ecological justifications for their claims, emphasising fishers' identity, experience and professional knowledge of the sea environment, and thereby asserting their professional authority in resource management. These experiences, however, did not belong to the fishers' discursive-political repertoire, but were primarily shared in the everyday arenas of fishing.

The newspapers' few references to legislation and rights, on the one hand, and different fishers' arguments that resource access was a question of human dignity and an issue for legislation, on the other, further demonstrated diverging arguments about fairness, emphasising how the media downplayed, while

fishers highlighted, the importance of the law in determining resource access. The fishers' arguments also showed that in the everyday, ideas of rights and entitlement did not involve a complete abandonment of patrimonial dependencies and hierarchies, which remained a part of how the different fishers asserted fairness. These issues underscored the impossibility of approaching the civic value order as a superior category compared with other value orders (Honneth, 2010: 379; Lounela, 2015).

Our analysis of subaltern claims in light of Boltanski and Thévenot's ideas shows how the value orders they list are not straightforwardly appropriate in a postcolonial context, as their meanings are context-dependent (Ilyin, 2015). What they do highlight, however, is how current conflicts over resources are fundamentally, and in multiple ways, linked to conflicting grammars of moral value. Finally, the model is most useful when an attention to values is combined with a simultaneous attention to the political and sometimes violent aspects of environmental conflicts, in order to identify the diverging 'persuasion power' and newsworthiness of different justifications. Together, these discussions draw attention to the challenges that subaltern groups face in building shared agendas for resource distribution (Blok, 2013).

Our analysis of the justifications for fishers' claims suggests a more complicated picture of the media's representational politics than most existing studies, which have emphasised unequal media visibility and misrepresentations of subaltern groups (Amenta and al., 2012; Sobieraj, 2010). In Tabasco, fisher leaders in particular, as well as some licensed fishers, actively used the discursive space provided by the newspapers, although the narratives of patrimony gave the fisher groups a vocabulary that undermined their agenda and worked to highlight existing divisions and hierarchies. Nonetheless, to a certain degree, they enabled claims to a meaningful place within social relations of hierarchy and dependency, resembling Awad's (2014) notions of the working of TV discourse as an arena for subaltern claims.

As our study stressed, however, the divergence between the dominant justification presented in the newspapers and the ecological justifications expressed by fishers themselves demonstrated that, when drawing on the patrimony justification, newspapers and fishers took part in constructing representations whose boundaries were primarily drawn by more politically powerful groups (Gitlin, 1980; Nygren, 2006). It highlighted that the political power of claims and justifications is always linked to the (un-)likelihood of groups with unequal access to power and resources being able to work together. It further demonstrates how even justifications that are shared among large groups are often accommodated to the dominant moral discourses promoted by political and economic elites, and the media's implicit rules of newsworthiness. Nonetheless, the fact that the media representations of fishers also involved some deviations from the dominant patrimonial grammar was a reminder

of the perpetually contingent character of representation. In other words, it evolves through struggles such as that of the fishers.

Furthermore, our analysis demonstrated that within the shifting processes of resource governance and proletarianisation, the narratives of patrimony had come to provide few points of reference for the increased number of fishers with no state-acknowledged identity, while promoting the interests of oil industry and state actors as well as socioeconomically-privileged fisher groups. In the context of new forms of resource governance, its role as a moral and political language had therefore weakened. The fishers' everyday narratives of patrimony, however, suggested that the threat of a new kind of poverty within the context of resource exclusion – Ferguson's 'asocial inequality', implying a cutting-off from former social relationships of inequality (2014: 155) – was experienced as something worse than the familiar, hierarchical social relations in which poverty in coastal Tabasco had previously been embedded. In the Tabascan context, strategic national interests were increasingly governed through mechanisms that involved the oil industry's privatisation, and the employment of public-private partnerships in the industry's compensation programs (Quist and Nygren, 2015). Ultimately, in these conditions the patrimony justification was flexibly accommodated as part of neoliberal politics, while identity-related quotidian arguments for resource access, which acknowledged the environment as constitutive of the fishers' way of life, remained unarticulated both in fishers' political claims and in the newspapers.

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III

Liina-Maija Quist

IN ÁLVARO'S HOUSE: FISHER LEADERS, FAMILY LIFE AND THE ETHNOGRAPHER AT MEXICO'S OIL FRONTIER

ABSTRACT

In this essay, I examine the practice of ethnographic knowledge-production through my fieldwork encounter with Álvaro, a political leader of fishers in Mexico's oil-producing state, Tabasco. Exercising ethnographic reflexivity, I analyze how my relations with Álvaro and his family in a context of conflict between fishers and the oil industry shaped my analytical lens on the politics of resource access. The essay focuses on ambiguity as an overriding characteristic of the research encounter, and suggests that paralleling ambiguities in my analysing of Álvaro during fieldwork and in my own, gendered and racialized positionality within the family were formative for my perspective on fisher – oil industry politics. Furthermore, the analysis shows how my knowledge about the 'field' was made in the intersection of my and the family's mutual efforts to draw each other into our categories of thinking, Álvaro's reflection about his role in politics, and the wider historical and political economic context shaping the relations between the fishers and the oil industry in the Gulf of Mexico. This analysis draws attention to the importance of ethnography in showing the complexity and situatedness of politics of resource access.

Key words: ambiguity, ethnography, fishers, gender, oil, politics, reflexivity

INTRODUCTION: FISHER POLITICS AND FAMILY LIFE[1]

> But to find those unmapped destinations I would have to abandon the purposes that first drove me down that road, and learn to ask directions from those who lived along it. (Michael Jackson 2012: 11)

> I've always defended my place. Others look for their own interests… I was a representative in the federal Federation of Fisheries… But I don't like to open up like this. That's why they're scared of me… I don't know why the government is the way it is. I don't know, but I don't want them to shape [manage] everybody… Liina, don't ask me any more questions. (Field notes from discussion with Álvaro Vázquez in 2011)

Álvaro Vázquez[2] was a respected oldtimer in fishers' cooperatives and in the sea fishers' political leadership in Tabasco, Mexico's

oil-producing state. He had grown up during the height of the government-introduced cooperative movement and the corporativist politics of authoritarian Mexico. My fieldwork took place in 2011–2012 and concerned a prolonged conflict over offshore areas between fishers and the oil industry at a time when Mexico's resource politics were undergoing a profound shift towards privatization. While I was trying to learn about fisher leaders' and fishers' politics vis-á-vis the oil industry, Álvaro and his family opened their home to me for three months. Álvaro's role in the conflict was troubled, because he operated as a mediator between the demands of thousands of internally-divided fishers and the co-optation pressures of the oil industry. In this setup, entering the family's intimate sphere to examine Álvaro's role in the tense political situation underscored the difficult compatibility of my researcher / 'daughterly' role in the family in ways that confounded me. In this essay, I analyze my navigation within the ambiguity of immersion in both resource politics and family life and within a tension between my preconceptions and my findings. Exercising ethnographic reflexivity, I also show how my attempts at making sense of Álvaro's, to me, ambiguous political position corresponded with my own ambiguous place in the family. I further show how my analytical insights about our relationship shaped my perspective onto resource politics in Tabasco.

My first meeting with Álvaro took place at a government secretariat in charge of mediating the relations between Tabasco's agrarian communities and the para-statal oil company, Petróleos Mexicanos[3] (Pemex), and gave me an idea of the control the government had in the resource conflict. I had recently begun fieldwork and, still inexperienced in Mexico and the politics of fisheries and oil at the Gulf-of-Mexico coast, I was hoping to embark on fieldwork in a fisher family and familiarize myself with fishers' organizations. However, a secretariat official had suggested that for reasons of security, I live with one of the fisher leaders rather than a rank-and-file fisher. He had then come up with the idea of my staying in Álvaro's household. At the meeting to discuss my fieldwork with Álvaro and four other fisher leaders, the secretariat official actively promoted the agenda of a fisher leader hosting my fieldwork, telling the leaders that by welcoming me, they would be returning a favour to the government for its 'important support for the fisher community'. There was an ease in the way the five fisher leaders slid into a filial role as the official addressed them paternalistically. As I expressed my hopes for fieldwork to the fisher leaders, it was Álvaro who reacted immediately, inviting me to live with his family without hesitation.

My six-month PhD fieldwork in 2011 and 2012 involved actors—sea fishers and government and oil industry representatives in particular—immersed in a prolonged controversy over Tabasco's coastal and offshore areas. I was especially interested in how fishers were making sense of, and reacting politically to, radical restrictions on their access to traditional fishing grounds at a time when the oil industry was both under major restructuration and expanding extraction to new areas. Since the early 2000s, intensified exploration and extraction of hydrocarbons in the Gulf of Mexico had caused continued tensions between the oil industry and the fishers. At the same time, the Mexican government had opened the energy sector to global investment and given transnational companies access to oil exploration and drilling via subcontracts with Pemex, until recently a para-statal company. The major controversy between the fishers and the oil industry concerned the establishment of

an offshore zone of exclusion in 2003, which had been reserved for the exclusive use of national and foreign oil industry actors. During fieldwork, I learned that after initial protests, the fishers' efforts to oppose the restrictions had fragmented and diminished, and the fishers' leadership, including Álvaro, had decided, rather, to engage in what the leaders called 'pacific negotiation' with the oil industry. In retrospect, I have come to see that the difficulties of doing fieldwork in Álvaro's family amidst the latent conflict were formative for my perspective on resource politics. In reflecting on this, I must inevitably downplay the warmth and friendliness with which we related to each other during most of my stay in Álvaro's house.

In Tabasco, a key task for me was to understand the politics of resource access by learning how state power operated in Mexico and, a related matter, what oil—which had had a fundamental role in shaping the relations between the state and people in Mexico—meant to Tabascan fisher leaders and fishers. Since the expropriation of the oil industry from foreign ownership by president Lázaro Cárdenas in 1938, the nation's oil had worked both as a powerful popular symbol in political claims for sharing wealth, and as a strategic resource in sustaining the political elite (Breglia 2013; Zalik 2012). Despite the corruption involved in the relations between the state and the oil industry, the recent years' political campaigns against the privatization of the oil industry show the continued popularity of the idea of the nation's oil. Furthermore, the Mexicans' oil nationalism was of a specific kind, given the political economic context wherein Mexico's close economic relations with the United States reconfigured the livelihoods and lives of millions of Mexicans. During my fieldwork, which coincided with Mexico's presidential and congressional election campaigns of 2012, debate regarding the oil industry's privatization was fierce. At the same time, along the coastline of Tabasco, foreign companies were busy exploring new reserves of oil.

Having moved in with Álvaro's family, I saw that the secrecy and suspicion that characterized the actors I studied also pervaded my relations with Álvaro, complicating my efforts to understand how politics operated among the fishers and oil industry and government actors. 'Álvaro keeps a distance with me which has so far made me careful with the questions I ask him,' I wrote in my diary in the early days of my stay. It was from the beginning obvious that it was in his nature to try to influence what kind of information I was to obtain. Álvaro was reserved in his dealings with me, and careful to point out that he operated within the framework of the law, which he knew profoundly. While I was aware that secrecy was an inevitable part of the political dynamics of the extractive industry, I was nevertheless unaccustomed to dealing with it on a daily basis for months, within the intimacy of family life, and had not considered this difficulty beforehand. My entering as an alien to 'snoop' around Álvaro's lot had quickly created an atmosphere where suspicion and familial relations of care coexisted in a strange and vulnerable status quo.

In this essay, exercising ethnographic reflexivity, I focus on the 'how' of ethnographically studying the politics of resource access. More specifically, I analyze the tension between my pre-expectations and findings to examine how ways of seeing and categorizing, mediated by gender, race and culture, including academic culture, figure in the interpretation of politics, the operation of which is partially hidden to the ethnographer. In doing this, I bring together reflexive analyses of researcher–interlocutor relations (Cerwonka and Malkki 2007; Coleman 2009; Kondo 1986; Landes 1986),

anthropological discussion on representing political agency (Anand 2011; Madhok 2013; Ortner 1995), and perspectives onto agrarian and resource politics in Mexico (Gledhill 2002; 2008; Nuijten 2004). The essay shows how Álvaro and I, each in our own way, dealt with the tensions that our expectations towards, and difficulty of making sense of, each other raised in the intimacy of family life in the context of the resource frontier. In discussing the Gulf of Mexico as a frontier, I want to highlight the offshore, following Watts (2015), as not only a territory at the margins of the state where 'often invisible, yet violent struggles over strategic resources and authority' take place, but also as 'a particular space—at once political, economic, cultural, and social—in which the conditions for a new phase of (extractive) accumulation are being put in place' (Watts 2012: 445). This highlights the particular moment in the connections between the intensification of Mexico's resource politics and wider, transnational networks of capital.

In reflecting on the process of fieldwork, I draw on earlier work by Borneman and Hammoudi (2009) and Cerwonka and Malkki (2007) concerning the construction of ethnographic knowledge through the ethnographer's personal engagement with interlocutors, and how the research encounter, shaped by the backgrounds of the ethnographer and the interlocutor and the broader context of the study, leads to insights into, and transformation of, the premises underlying the ethnographer's analytical strategies. Here, my focus is on particular tensions in my and Álvaro's mutual relationship, which were born out of the disappointments I felt when reality did not correspond with my expectations which related, above all, to my ability to encounter an active organization with a radical political leadership; that is, to discover sites and practices of 'resistance' among the local fishers. Instead, I encountered Álvaro, who sought to influence my fieldwork, in part by highlighting the genderedness of our relations. Recognizing the shortcomings of an initial fixation on the disappointment that my expectations had not been met allowed me to struggle harder to understand the framework of power in which the fisher leaders operated. It also drew my attention to the structure of incentives where I myself was placed, and indicated a link between my culturally-mediated expectations and those in anthropology regarding the character of subaltern politics.

In correspondingly analysing my attempts to deal with the expectations that Álvaro and his family had of me, I draw on Landes' (1986) and Kondo's (1986) insights into the analytical processes of female ethnographers who examine patriarchal societies. I suggest that my perspective onto the relations between fishers and the oil industry was shaped in important ways by Álvaro's family members' attempts to deal with my ambiguous gender role as a female researcher and my whiteness and foreignness by placing me in meaningful cultural roles in the family. Despite my initial attempts to fit in with the family and accept Álvaro's authoritative guidance of my fieldwork, I eventually increasingly sought the company of other people, including foreign oil workers, outside of the family's immediate networks. This process was emotionally taxing for both the family and me and at the same time, or partly because, it revealed multiple dimensions of the distance between us. The following sections show how we sought to deal with living together.

The next section introduces the context of Tabasco's resource conflict and the fisher leaders. Subsequent sections three to five examine two key ambiguities that shaped my fieldwork. Section three provides a study of

the tensions between Álvaro's tactics when operating as my interlocutor and my analytical preconceptions pertaining to the existence of a fishers' organization or movement with a radical political leadership. These elements came together in how I examined Álvaro as an ambiguous leader in my early fieldwork. The fourth section shows how the gendered and racialized aspects of the interactions between me and various interlocutors in- and outside Álvaro's house also shaped my analytical lens on resource politics. In the fifth section, I attempt a reflexive analysis of my relationship with Álvaro, and show how it helped me identify various structural incentives (Shapiro 2005) that shaped the agendas of the leaders, fishers, and also myself. The point of this is to suggest how my reflexive analysis has allowed for a deeper understanding of the multiple political projects among the leaders and, thus, for insights into the rationalities of power in Tabasco and Mexico. The sixth part concludes the essay and shows how ambiguity worked as my key lens on the role of mediation in the politics of resource conflict.

STUDYING FISHER LEADERS' POLITICS IN COASTAL TABASCO

The social groups in coastal Tabasco that Álvaro and the political leadership of sea fishers seek to represent are very heterogeneous. Communities involved in fishing are differentiated by livelihoods, social status and political position. There are at least 7,000 sea fishers,[4] half of whom are unlicensed (*pescadores libres*) while the other half consists of approximately 2,700 cooperative fishers and 800 license-holding entrepreneurs (*permisionários*) who usually do not fish themselves. In addition, many people move between fishing and farming according to the time of year. Many of the unlicensed fishers are ex-cooperative members, half of whom now work under more or less casual arrangements for the wealthier *permisionarios* while the rest are informal, independent fishers.[5] The proletarianization of the fishing communities, the competition over restricted space, and the large number of unlicensed fishers who have limited political rights, inevitably fragments their political agendas. Consequently, relations between licensed and unlicensed fishers are conflictive. Furthermore, the decreasing viability of fishing since the early 2000s has motivated fishers' migration to urban areas and to the United States.

Pemex, which is the eleventh largest oil company in the world and the third largest exporter of crude oil to the United States (United States Energy Information Administration 2013), has an active presence in the everyday life of the fishing communities. Pemex initiated the development of Tabascan offshore oil reserves in 1977–1980 (Quist and Nygren 2015: 46). With the ramping-up of oil production, coastal populations began to recognize the wide-scale impacts of the oil industry on their environment. Today, the giant Sonda de Campeche (Campeche Sound) complex in the Gulf of Mexico accounts for 51 percent of Mexico's oil production (ibid.). It involves over 200 oil-production platforms and roughly 160 foreign companies that operate there as suppliers.

The historical role of oil in mediating the relations between the people and the state in Mexico is reflected in the contemporary relations between Tabasco's coastal populations and the state and the oil industry. The symbolically powerful idea of oil as the nation's resource, belonging to all Mexicans, has fuelled peasant mobilizations for social benefits since the 1938 expropriation of the oil industry from foreign

ownership (Gledhill 2002: 45). To restabilize its hegemony in the 1970s, the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (PRI) 'statisized' the economy by extending concessions to the peasant sector through its political networks and state clientelism, funded by Mexico's oil revenues (ibid.). In Tabasco and elsewhere, oil revenues have had a central role in mobilizations against the social and environmental impacts of oil (Breglia 2013). In 1976–1983, small farmers, fishers and trade unions organized a large-scale political movement, called *Pacto Ribereño*, against the oil industry. However, Pemex and the government have sought to control both the *Pacto Ribereño* and more recent mobilizations by employing economic compensation, legal measures, and political repression, including imprisonment for political leaders (Guzmán Ríos 2009).

Since 1992, the Mexican government has opened the energy sector to global investment and given foreign companies access to oil exploration and drilling under subcontracts with Pemex (Martínez Laguna 2004). In Tabasco, the increase of foreign subcontractors has taken place since the early 2000s. In 2003, the government imposed security restrictions on traffic near oil installations in the Gulf of Mexico in a 15,907 km^2 marine zone of exclusion, established under the federal legislation '*Acuerdo Secretarial* No. 117' (Diario Oficial 2003). This bans all but oil industry operatives within the zone. While the agreement was justified on the grounds of its contribution to the prevention of terrorism and to security enhancement, one of its aims seems to have been to avoid offshore social confrontation, thus ensuring undisturbed oil production (Quist and Nygren 2015). Recent legal reforms to privatize the oil industry (Diario Oficial de la Federación 2014a; 2014b) despite opposition by a large proportion of Mexicans, were introduced under President Enrique Peña Nieto's (PRI) administration. This took place soon after the PRI returned to power, having re-gained the presidency from the right-wing *Partido de Acción Nacional* (PAN), which had ruled the country during two successive terms from 2000 until 2012, after the PRI's prior 70-year era. The expansion of operations in coastal areas with the participation of foreign subcontractors is likely to increase the oil industry's influence on the living conditions of fishing communities considerably in the future.

In 2011–2012, the fishers' leadership consisted of 12 middle-aged men, most of whom had a decades-long history in the fishers' organizations of mediating relations with the oil industry, and were involved in the fishing business either as cooperative leaders or private entrepreneurs. During my stay in Tabasco, the fishers' struggle against the recent restrictions on movement near the oil installations was in a latent phase. Instead of engaging in open conflict, the fishers' leaders focused on employing the restricted mechanisms of the law to defend their access to the Gulf while the oil industry's tactic has appeared to be to shape the conflict into one over economic compensation through the continuation of clientelist relations within its social responsibility and compensation schemes. Furthermore, complaints of environmental and social harm, compensation demands, and the oil industry's corporate social responsibility activities were all managed by a state secretariat; from the fishers' perspective, this diffused culpability and the division of responsibilities between the state and the oil industry. At the same time, fragmented groups of fishers organized protests both onshore and at sea, demanding fairer resource access and firmer adherence to agreements concerning compensation. In 2011–2012, fishers' frustrations regarding the leaders' forms of 'pacific' negotiation and thus lack of

aggressive pressure towards the oil industry were part of quotidian tensions in the coastal communities.

Changes in environmental legislation at the federal level in 2012 may provide new opportunities for Tabasco's coastal communities to stake collective claims against the oil industry. The *Ley de Acciones Colectivas* (Law on Collective Actions), which enables groups of at least thirty persons to raise class-action claims for environmental harms caused by the oil industry, has already made it possible for a group of fishers and small-scale farmers from the interior of Tabasco to use the law as a basis for suing Pemex, its subsidiaries and the involved government institutes for damages caused to the environment and local livelihoods (Asociación Ecológica Santo Tomás 2013; Inter Press Service 2013). If fishers are able to meet the burden of demonstrating oil-derived environmental harms and verify that those harms are the cause of reduced fish catches, the case could bolster their efforts to regain their rights to the sea space and livelihoods as sea fishers.

ETHNOGRAPHY AND THE SEARCH FOR THE SUBJECT OF RESISTANCE

Having moved to live with his family, the course of my fieldwork became influenced by my relationships with Álvaro and the seven family-members of the Vázquez household, especially Álvaro's youngest child, 24-year old Sofia. Whereas Álvaro took care of familiarizing me with the practice and local politics of fishing, Sofia was the most eager of the Vázquezes to get to know me as a person. In retrospect, reflecting on my intense involvement with both father and daughter made me pause to analyze how my preconceptions and my positionality influenced my perception. A crucial aspect of this was paying attention to how the three of us sought to categorize each other.

Ethnographic analyses by Anand (2011) and Madhok (2013) about political agency in two different 'oppressive contexts' (Madhok 2013) in India provide a frame for examining my difficulty in interpreting and representing Álvaro's place in the political setup that was enfolding me. The nuanced differences between these two authors in focusing either on the constrains (Madhok 2013) or on the complexity and possibilities (Anand 2011) of agency made me further examine analytical perspective as a question of epistemological choice-making. However, during early fieldwork, my difficulty in conceptualizing the fishers' and their leaders' relations with the oil industry resembled more what Ortner (1995) points to as leading to 'ethnographic thinness' in studies of resistance: my own commitment to social change, mediated through the values of my culture made it hard for me to accept that Álvaro was in many ways an effect of the operation of power at the oil frontier. In this situation, it was tempting to think of Álvaro's agency in terms of either succeeding or failing in radically defying the state-industry politics through persistent and clearly-formulated political claims.

Hence, at the same time as I needed Álvaro to represent resistance, Álvaro and his family sought to make sense of my intentions and to fit me into their categories. As Kondo (1986) points out in her analysis, attempts like these are part and parcel of the negotiation of power between the ethnographer and the interlocutor. For me, the study of a resource conflict, the fragmented factions of which I was as yet unable to identify and access in the fisher communities, increased my dependence on Álvaro in terms of how I framed and interpreted the data I collected. However, as I show below,

Álvaro's influence on my thinking was not straightforward but grew out of tensions with my own disposition to assess Álvaro according to particular categorizations. Mostly, I was trying to grasp on whose 'side' Álvaro stood as a leader; was he merely trying to benefit from his mediator position or did he have a political agenda in defence of Tabasco's fishers?

During my first month, Álvaro actively introduced me to certain important places and people. He occupied a long-time position as a cooperative leader, and had a number of both protégés and rival leaders in the coastal fisher communities. Well aware of some fishers' accusations of corruption against him and other leaders, Álvaro occasionally made an effort to emphasize to me that he had 'nothing to hide'. However, I realized he was not in the position to invite me to various political meetings between fishers and the oil industry, which interested me. Being left out, especially during the first weeks of fieldwork, highlighted my impression that there was a realm of negotiations between the fishers and the oil industry which remained invisible to me. It also exacerbated my perplexity about Álvaro's agency; whether he was, in fact, fish or fowl.

My first weeks with Álvaro thus demonstrated Álvaro's difficult position between the oil industry and his constituents. However, it also brought out a concern he seemed to have of my being in his house. Considering that Álvaro's interpretations of my intentions and of my foreignness may have been far from straightforward, and taking into account the history of complicated relations between Mexicans and Americans, I think it is possible that one of his judgements about me was that I was some sort of *gringa*.[6]

At the same time, I became increasingly aware in my relations with Sofia and the rest of the family how ambiguous as a woman I was from the family's perspective. Álvaro's wife Doña Elena, their daughter Sofia and the other women of the household never asked me about my work but instead focused their comments on my womanhood through discussions about appearance, sexuality, reproduction and family. All of this highlighted the tensions between my roles as a woman and as a researcher of masculine spheres. The ambiguity of my femininity in the eyes of the family's women further increased the difficulty of fieldwork; it was not only the fact that I had no access to Álvaro's dealings with the oil industry but also the difficulty of being seen both as a female and a researcher that made fitting in hard. It was here, in the crossroads of encountering Álvaro and the family as foreign, white, a researcher and a woman, where my analytical lens on the politics of resource access began to gain focus.

Coleman (2009) and Uusihakala (2016) have analyzed the ethical and analytical difficulties they have faced as ethnographers when interlocutors whose behaviour they have been tempted to judge morally have actively sought to challenge their thinking. The tensions involved in these relations reveal crucial aspects of both the research subject and the authors' own thinking. However, what interests me in these relationships and my own case is also their dynamic processuality. Within the three months of fieldwork with Álvaro, thanks to his persistence, my initial will to judge gradually changed into a desire to hear.

The first thing Álvaro did was to familiarize me with the legislative framework for fisheries, and to take me to interview people who belonged to his group of leaders. Ten days after my arrival in the family, he made me acquainted with two cooperative fishers who introduced me to the internal division and frustration over differentiated access to the sea, and to political subjectivity in the coastal communities. During

our conversations, however, the fishers vented their frustration about the situation on Álvaro's person.

Francisco was the first of these interviewees. No sooner had I asked him about the restrictions on fishing in the Gulf, than he began to press Álvaro about money and fishing nets that his fisher cooperative was supposed to have received from the governmental secretariat as compensation for oil explorations. Álvaro seemed very uncomfortable, and quickly the atmosphere became tense.

> Francisco: 'I didn't like how they managed the fishing nets. I had asked for nets for seven boats.'
>
> Álvaro: 'Pemex gave a negative reply ... it washed its hands … to me they gave 10.'

A very tense exchange of words ensued. I listened for a while and then asked what the discussion was about. Álvaro explained to me that the secretariat had offered a helping hand to sea-fishers by donating fishing nets to cooperatives, while Pemex had refused to give nets to anyone. In other words, instead of Pemex compensating the fishers for harm it had caused their fishing activities, a common procedure in the oil industry, nets had been donated ('*regaló*') by the secretariat. Álvaro said that for some reason the nets had been distributed unevenly, some cooperatives getting as many as 20 nets, others just a few, and he himself 10. Francisco's look was incredulous and really angry. I asked why this unevenness and Álvaro could not explain. Instead, he asked me to go to the other side of the yard and check out the fishers packing iced fish onto a truck going to Mexico City. Then he ended the interview abruptly.

In an interview with another fisher, Juan, right after Francisco's, the tension was even more palpable. Juan was visibly surprised and uncomfortable about our arrival. I asked him general questions about the economic situation of fishers after the establishment of the *zona de exclusión*. Soon, the interview turned into a tense discussion between Juan and Álvaro. Juan, anxious, asked Álvaro about gasoline, saying, 'We were supposed to receive gasoline from Explora[7] every three months but we haven't received anything the whole year.' Then he said that *pescadores libres* need to have some alternative, and to 'calm down', as 'this is going to continue'. Juan complained to Álvaro that the Secretary in charge of mediations with the oil industry never wants to receive him, meanwhile explaining to me that 'it isn't convenient for the government that there is political organization' among *pescadores libres*. Álvaro was again very uncomfortable, and vaguely promised to try and contact a politician he knew, and asked Juan not to 'compromise' him. As communication between the two men grew even tenser, Álvaro suddenly decided to go home, saying people were expecting him.

On the way home from these strange 'interviews', both of which had ended abruptly, Álvaro asked me what I had thought of them. Astonished by the turn of events and the threatening atmosphere, I was unable to say much. I was too apprehensive to ask Álvaro why exactly the fishers had seemed both angry and afraid; Álvaro's dealings with me in the first days of fieldwork had made me sense that my curiosity tended to raise his suspicions. Later I saw that by taking me to people who accused him of failure and embezzlement, he had been openly showing me the dynamics of the context where he, as a leader, was trying to deal with the divide-and-rule tactics of the oil industry. Much later, I saw this had also been his test for me, one which I had not quite passed. My attention, even though I did not discuss it with

Álvaro, had not been on Álvaro's complicated position, but on my own fear and anxiety about the tenseness of the communications, and on my disappointment in Álvaro's failure to stand up for the cooperative and unlicensed fishers whom I thought he had the ethical, if not legal, obligation to represent. This, and Álvaro's secrecy—which I did not understand at the time may have been more a basic suspicion of my intentions, or something he was pressurised into—persuaded me to see him as a failing leader. The interviews, however, also usefully turned my attention to the hierarchies and conflicts of the fisher communities, to the diffuse division of responsibilities between the *paraestatal* and the secretariat, and to how these and the oil industry's complex politics of exclusion worked among and against the fishers. I also began to see there was much more heterogeneity in the agendas of different fishers and leaders than I had initially envisaged.

Although at the time I did not see that Álvaro had been testing me, I soon began to feel increasingly uncomfortable about asking him about his relations with the oil industry. I felt I had *no right* to be nosy, and found myself feeling ashamed of my spy-like curiosity. Álvaro had given me a glimpse of how power worked at the resource frontier, but had then closed the 'curtain', leaving me wondering whether I had failed to gain his trust, or whether it was the politically more powerful actors behind the scenes who threatened my further access. However, the interviews also underscored the double role I had in the family: at the same time as apparent political contradictions seemed to block my access to certain issues, paradoxically, as a woman I was already *inside the sphere of the intimate* as a kind of sister, a role which was emphasized especially in my relations with Sofia.

It was soon obvious to me, however, that it was impossible for Álvaro to influence where I went and what I came to know. After six weeks of living in the family, Freddy, a fisher who belonged to the federation headed by Álvaro, told me about an event where Pemex, Explora, and the secretariat had given out motors to coastal fishers, Álvaro's federation included, as compensation for Explora's studies that were hampering offshore fishing. Freddy wanted me to think that Álvaro had actively kept me from knowing about the meeting but I later understood that I had no way of knowing whether that had actually been the case. Then, two weeks later, as I returned home from a week-long trip to Ciudad de México, I saw I had arrived in the middle of what was going to be a meeting between 20 fishers and two officials from the secretariat in the Vázquez living room:

> Although I have told Álvaro about the time of my arrival, I realize my coming is a s urprise to everyone. There are approximately 13 people in the living room; everybody is waiting for the rest of the fishers to arrive from nightfishing *robalo* [bass]. I am told that people from the secretariat are coming too, on the business of *empleo emergente,* which is temporary work, typically in road maintenance or other infrastructural work, provided to fishers by the oil industry during low seasons in fishing. After half an hour the men from the secretariat arrive. They are two, and they're clearly not happy to see me among the fishers. Álvaro mumbles something to them about not having known about my coming. The men sit by a table where they spread their papers and begin to call the fishers by name to sign a paper. They take a photo of each fisher and check their identity card; this is a way to make sure that the *empleo emergente* does not go to wrong persons. The entire

> operation is very serious, and the officials display an arrogance towards the fishers while they make no contact whatsoever to me. When the photos and the signatures are over, the fishers leave and Doña Elena invites the secretariat men to the kitchen for lunch. Nobody says anything to me; I'm invisible, and not welcome in the men's company. I go to my room, keeping the door open but I'm not able to hear what they are talking about. (Fieldnotes 2011)

These glimpses into interactions between the fishers, the oil industry and the government convinced me that my presence in them was not welcomed by the oil industry. I consequently changed my fieldwork strategies to expand my study to fishers and leaders beyond Álvaro's circle and began to avoid telling him where I was going. Álvaro, respectively, continued to be suspicious of my activities, something reflected in his inquiries to me about whether I had already 'reported to Finland' about my findings, and his apparent relief when I said I had not, saying that 'with time I would gain access to everything I needed to understand'. Once he also jokingly suggested I was a spy. While at the time I was frustrated by these suspicions regarding my intentions in studying Álvaro, I was unable to see all the possible reasons that may have fuelled them. Of course, the entire setup of my stay in his family was highly exceptional and perhaps gave reason to suspect my alliance with state actors. However, my being a foreigner, with features and habits that resembled those of the white oil workers who walked the streets of coastal Tabasco and extracted Mexico's resources for the increasing benefit of others, may have meant more to Álvaro that I at the time understood. On top of that, the fact that I was myself also occupied in trying to figure him out possibly increased his suspicions.

In analyzing the politics of oil and fisheries from Álvaro's house, I saw that the ambiguity I observed in Álvaro as a leader paralleled my own experience of ambiguity in the family. At the same time as I tried to grasp whether Álvaro was completely co-opted by the oil industry or was also actively defending the fishers' livelihood, I also felt that my own positionality as a foreign researcher-woman in the family was full of irreconcilable ambiguity. While these ambiguities involved two different issues, they were not unrelated; both linked to attempts by me on the one hand, and by Álvaro's family on the other, to affect the dynamics of the research encounter (Kondo 1986). Moreover, they became my angle onto both my own preconceptions regarding fieldwork, and to the rationalities of power of which Álvaro was part.

Examined from this perspective, I later saw that my initial frustration with Álvaro's tactics of controlling my fieldwork were linked to my own search for 'resistance', which was partly a result of the influence of research literature and of the ethos of my training, which focused on social movements. However, a coherent movement did not exist, and even trying to identify an unambiguous social group of fishers was difficult because of the social, political and economic heterogeneity of the coastal communities. Furthermore, the fisher leaders were not in charge of a radical political agenda in defence of fishers' livelihoods; rather their actions resembled more those of the syndicates or local politicians. In other words, instead of corresponding to my interlinked, culturally-mediated scientific and personal expectations of 'good' subaltern leaders, the behaviour of Álvaro and his peers pushed me to re-evaluate my conceptual apparatus.

I suggest that the disappointments I had in dealing with the tensions between expectations and findings are revealing about the wider structures (Shapiro 2005) that shape ethnographers' expectations towards interlocutors. My initial search for the existence of some kind of resistance among fishers and more radical political agency in Álvaro were also motivated by my liberal democratic cultural background and the structure of incentives in the academy. As I write above, the implications of the latter show in the tendency, in anthropology and also in disciplines such as development studies, to think of the political agency of those often described as subaltern in binary terms, of resistance / compliance, or through social movements (Bebbington and Abramovaj 2008; Carruthers 2008; Nash 2004), instead of examining the complexity of agency and political projects (Anand 2011; Golub 2014; Madhok 2013). This contradiction in anthropology is linked to a tension between the discipline's relativist will to understand the world and anthropology's universalist liberal ideals about changing it. For me, developing an understanding of the ambiguous and multiple politics of different groups of fishers and fisher leaders thereby required me during my first weeks of fieldwork to overcome the tendency to focus on 'resistance' and instead 'ask directions from those who lived along' the way, to return to Jackson's quotation in the epigraph (2012: 11).

Álvaro's persistence in getting me to see his contradictory positionality was instructive in terms of working my way through this initial disappointment. Its consequence was a gradual transformation in the way I observed and thought about the 'field' and about myself as an ethnographer. Comprehending the fishers' heterogeneity and their perspectives onto the working of power would not have been possible without my having also become part of the secrecy and power games, which forced me to examine the origins of my preconceptions for fieldwork and findings.

Studies on the operation of state power in Mexico's agrarian and resource politics by Gledhill (2002; 2015) and Nuijten (2004), provide a framework for placing the field encounter in the wider political and economic context. Nuijten (2004) argues that the non-resolution of agrarian conflicts in Mexico through the combination of state violence and reproduction of people's hopes of access to justice is characteristic of the operation of power. Furthermore, in his recent work, Gledhill (2015) suggests that control over oil is increasingly linked to the ways state power operates 'behind masks' through the elite's strategies to re-impose authority by incorporating criminal actors into governance, co-opting others and criminalizing social movements. As for the fisher leaders' and fishers' politics, in addition to the role of the idea of oil as a shared resource and a source of national pride in influencing popular and sanctioned narratives about rights to resources, fishers' criminalization and the non-resolution of the conflict complicated their claim-making over access to what they, in essence, considered fishers' territory.

THE FACE OF PROTECTION

In her essay about fieldwork in Brazil, Ruth Landes (1986: 138) speaks about how learning her place in the community was 'one's only vantage point for penetrating the culture' and gaining a perspective onto the issues she studied. For Landes, this primarily meant that her lens became one of a highly gendered and sexualized actor, immersed in masculine networks of patronage. Correspondingly, Kondo (1986), herself Japanese American, shows how her assuming a daughterly role in a Japanese family

produced a profound crisis of self, which led to an understanding about the Japanese conception of the relationship between the self and the social world. In my fieldwork, while Álvaro defied my attempts to categorize him, from the family's point of view I also avoided pigeonholing. Having arrived in Tabasco without the properties of a Mexican, social, adult female (husband and children), it was easiest for the family to ascribe to me a kind of daughterly role although, in reality, as noted earlier, I was of course a white alien from a higher social stratum whose work in men's spheres examining politically sensitive issues was not ordinary woman's work. Consequently, family members, and especially Sofia, seemed intent on offsetting my complex positionality, alienness and our class differentials by highlighting my gender. Their very subtle, everyday attempts to emplace me in their context by referencing my womanhood resonated with the gendered aspects of my interaction with Álvaro and the fishers and also shaped my view of how power worked within the coastal communities.

Sofia was a teacher by profession. During the relatively short period of three months, we found a common language in which to talk about issues, especially those relating to being a woman and gaining a livelihood. I participated in Sofia's efforts to make a living, which extended beyond her daily job to less formal, home-based businesses in vending vegetables, fruit and shoes. Sofia also devoted much of her free time to a teenagers' dance and drumming group, which she saw as having the social function of keeping the young out of drugs and the drug trade. Having danced myself since childhood, I began to follow Sofia's group's rehearsals and performances to various parts of Tabasco and other parts of Mexico. Sofia was curious about ethnography's method of living with people as a way to do research, and my impression was that she interpreted it as my becoming more like her instead of the skinny researcher, too immersed in reading and writing, that I was in her eyes. Sofia often made remarks about my appearance, eagerly instructing me in the proper ways to emphasize my femininity and sexuality by becoming 'fuller'. For me, however, Sofia's encouragements to become a Tabascan woman and thereby culturally meaningful for her were unsettling because they seemed to express resentment that the gap between us consisted of fundamental race and class differentials.

Furthermore, there was an aspect of control in Sofia's gendered and sexualized objectification of me which corresponded with the fishers' and their leaders' attempts at impacting the dynamics of the research encounter through subtly sexualized behaviour. These efforts also made me an object in these encounters, shaping the power dynamics of the research. However, whereas the sexualized aspect of my gender was highlighted in the encounters outside of home, inside, my gender was far more ambiguous and confusing to me, allowing the family to categorize me both as a 'daughter' and a woman. This ambiguity especially came together in the power dynamics between me and Álvaro, enabling the coexistence of a sexualized aspect and a more familial dynamic.

I understood this for the first time five weeks into fieldwork, when I had grown stressed about Álvaro's suspicions of me and about my own continuous efforts to categorize him and had begun spending more time with people outside the home. By then, the Vázquez kitchen had become the place where I often spent time talking with Álvaro, mostly listening to his various stories. In the weeks when I began to distance myself from his networks of fishers, he told me two stories that deviated from his usual style and had a supernatural dimension. Twice he shared a story about his grandmother who

had been a witch, able at will to turn herself into an animal. As a young man, when arriving home from a party at night, he had sometimes bumped into the grandmother when she had turned herself into a pig. Another out-of-the-ordinary story that he told me took place when my fieldwork stress had become nearly overwhelming. The message of the story was so strange to me that, anxious as I already was about our relations, I avoided asking him why he told it. The story went this way: In the past, people lived to be 115 to 120 years old. This was because in those days people ate more fruit. More curiously, he added, they also made love only once in eight days, wearing red bandages around their foreheads and taking the entire night. When the sex was over, Álvaro said, people did not shower but sat together to eat chicken.

I still am not sure why Álvaro wanted me to hear the stories, although I have two different interpretations of them. They could have been his way of communicating about how radically he thought life's fundamentals, spirituality and sexuality, had changed during his lifetime. In the stories, the control over these fundamentals rested in the communities themselves. Álvaro often communicated corresponding experiences of change and/or loss, ranging from a personal experience of losing control of the body through increased consumption of imported, industrialized food to the dissolving of social networks of mutual support and solidarity. From this perspective, what went on in the politics of resource access was part of a much larger and long-term change whereby the government had come to exert control over issues previously under the communities' authority. I have come to think that perhaps he was making a claim to that control.

At the same time, the stories could be heard as what Crapanzano (2012: 558–559) discusses as references to 'the Third'. According to him, in fieldwork situations where interpersonal relations and their relevant context are under negotiation, interaction may make reference to a Third, an authoritative figure, a totem or a father who is outside of the interaction and serves the meta-pragmatic function of defining the encounter, its relevant context and how the communication is to be taken. Álvaro's references to the secrets of longevity and to his grandmother as a witch were both gendered and sexualized, the former openly so and the latter more subtly. Following Crapanzano's thought, and considering Kondo's (1986) analysis, Álvaro's stories, especially the one about longevity, could perhaps be interpreted as the context for my and Álvaro's research encounter, highlighting Álvaro's authority and my womanhood at a moment when I sought to evade his efforts to shape my fieldwork.

In response to my perceived control and objectification, then, I expanded fieldwork to people outside of Álvaro's sphere of influence. At the same time as this was a conscious research strategy, in some ways it also resembled the crisis Kondo (1986) describes, as I felt unable to fit the categories that were there for me. Six weeks into fieldwork, I began to suggest to Álvaro my plans of involving *pescadores libres* in my study. Understanding better their place in resource politics, I explained, was a necessary part of my research; in response, Álvaro mostly expressed concern about my safety. Every time I mentioned my plans to him, he would warn me that wandering alone into the unlicensed fishers' living quarters at the town's outskirts could be dangerous and suggest that I go with his nephew. When I asked other people, however, I was told that the area did not pose a risk for me, and ten weeks into fieldwork I went ahead, riding on the back of the scooter of a female acquaintance I had met at a town café.

During interviews with the *pescadores libres*, however, I came across a situation which heightened the impression that I was unable to judge the extent of government control at the oil frontier. I was interviewing the wife of an unlicensed fisher when a car drove into the yard and two men got out, asking the woman for her ID. All three of them were extremely serious, and I seemed to be entirely invisible to the men, who took the ID, bought a bag of shrimp from the woman's stall and left. I was terrified. I asked the woman what had just happened and she said that the men would return and bring the ID back with a pig for her. Later I learned this transaction of relinquishing one's ID in return for a pig was an old PRI vote-buying tactic (the elections were the following year) of making people believe they were able to follow how people voted by taking copies of the IDs of those who had promised their votes to the party.

Yet why did the men not seem to stop at any other house? Why did they not pay any attention to me even though seeing a *gringa* on her own in a tiny fisher community far from downtown should have caught their attention? Like the secretariat officials at Álvaro's house, these men did not appear to notice me. Was I only growing increasingly suspicious about the government's following me at the same time that I had decided to overstep the boundaries that Álvaro had tried to impose? I never told Álvaro about the men; neither did I report anything to my notebook about how terrified I had been. The incident fused into a general feeling resembling paranoia that I experienced in those weeks.

Back at home, I did tell Álvaro about my interviews, however, and he countered me aggressively. 'What did they cry to you about?' he asked with a tone that mocked the fishers' concerns. I was shocked I had underestimated the situation and let myself believe that Álvaro 'understood' that I would eventually go beyond his networks. At that moment my feeling was one of sudden fright and anger about his reaction to my crossing a line I had refused to accept. Terribly uncomfortable, I responded vaguely that the unlicensed fishers had concerns similar to those of other fishers and refused to continue the conversation. Álvaro calmed down, left my desk and went to watch TV. We never returned to the issue of the interviews.

The tensions that surfaced during the kitchen table discussions and after the interviews with unlicensed fishers took place in the intersection of the roles into which I and Álvaro's family tried to fit each other. They revealed to me how much was at stake for Álvaro in his wish that I respect the boundaries he tried to set for me. They also exposed my naïveté over our familial roles and my hope that by knowing me as a family-member, which I of course never really was, Álvaro could somehow be sympathetic to my project, no matter where it took me. But then, why would he, considering his jokes about my being a potential spy. In retrospect, how much, in any case, did he actually want to 'control' me, and how much was it just in his nature to be suspicious, or alternatively, to succumb to pressures from other quarters?

The efforts by the Vázquezes to shape the contours of me and my project, and my own initial efforts to play along, made me aware of the distance between us, which in turn shaped my perspective onto the politics of fisheries and oil. Seeing how, despite trying to fit into the family, I was unable to 'become' a Tabascan woman or assuage Álvaro's suspicions about my intentions, I began to spend more time with other townspeople and foreign oil workers I had come to know. While my decision to invest in these other networks bore some similarities to Kondo's (1986) fieldwork, an obvious difference was Tabasco's political context where

tensions between different actors surfaced in the every day. The women of Álvaro's family had so far been a kind of an escape from the masculine and often confrontational spaces, and I now similarly sought the company of female acquaintances and foreign men working for Explora, who represented social relations that I felt were free from patronage. Yet this made me realize that the protection of Álvaro, the family and other fisher families had actually provided me with a sense of comfort and security; but having lost my patience with Álvaro's 'guidance' of my fieldwork and by not following the rules of the networks based on male authority, I had lost my claim to a woman's place. In these new, ephemeral relationships with people outside of Álvaro's circles, I found myself looking for the same kind of protection; not finding it, I felt vulnerable.

The Vázquez women met my increased absence from home by correspondingly excluding me from some of their familial activities and conversations. Because the change in their behaviour was subtle, I did not feel comfortable bringing it up and was thus unsure of possible reasons for it. It seemed to me as if the women were communicating perplexity, disapproval and disappointment in my refusal to try harder. While it was easy for me to explain both to myself and to them that I was busy working with fishers and oil workers, the women possibly interpreted my behaviour very differently. For them it perhaps meant a reluctance to engage in the household duties and discussions they shared, lack of appreciation for their concern for my security when moving around by myself, and suspicious relations with foreign, white men who for them possibly represented the invasion of their territory and patrimony, despite the fact that existing resentments about *gringos* were seldom expressed.

RATIONALITIES OF POWER AT HOME AND AT THE SEA

LESS VISIBLE POLITICS

The fear, secrecy and silence characteristic of conflict and post conflict contexts draw the ethnographer's attention to cues for understanding beyond words (Geros 2008; Taussig 2011). With Álvaro's house as my window to the fishers' situation, I realized the politics of access to Doña Elena's kitchen had metaphorically begun to resemble *la zona restringida* (this was how fishers often called the zone of exclusion). I had noticed that the kitchen, located at the furthest end of the house, was the space where only family, close friends and other Very Important People were allowed, the way the zone of exclusion only gave access to the oil industry. Less familiar people who sought Álvaro's advice—and there were many for him to attend to—were dealt with on the porch while some were invited inside to the living room. As my room was adjacent to the living room, in the space in between the porch and the kitchen, I got to observe the social geography of the relations between Álvaro and his protégés and patrons.

There was some resemblance between the positions Álvaro occupied in the house and with regard to the offshore. While the unequal spatial politics of the house and the offshore in some ways served Álvaro's interests, he could not exert ultimate control over who was allowed in. From the door of my room, I saw how Doña Ana opened the kitchen door for the secretariat men as mandatory guests. Correspondingly, Álvaro helped keep the oil industry in and the fishers out of the zone of exclusion by exercising his mediatory powers and avoiding open protest. However, while the government sought to use Álvaro to maintain the useful hierarchies

between those fishers with access to livelihoods and political representation and those without, Álvaro also actively looked for ways to escape control, assisting fishers to defy the constraining rules of compensation programs. I am pressed to wonder—at home, had Álvaro perhaps also been flouting the repressive politics by organizing a meeting with the secretariat representatives on a day when I, a potentially unwanted set of eyes and ears, from the oil industry's perspective, was scheduled to appear, surprising the representatives?

Being excluded from many of the political negotiations between the fishers' leadership and the oil industry, especially at the beginning of fieldwork, gave me an important entry point into the rationality of the leaders' actions vis-á-vis the state and the oil industry. My attention was on the tensions among the different groups of fishers, entrepreneurs and political leaders, on the secrecy involved, and on the importance that leaders placed on seeking protection from governmental institutions and political parties. Together, these issues showed me how the leaders' ideas of the state drew on the residue of corporativism and government control, linked with the legacy of the authoritarian past and the strongly symbolic importance of the parastatal company in national politics and as well as the popular idea of oil as a patrimonial resource (Breglia 2013; Quist and Rinne forthcoming; Zalik 2012). Concomitantly, the fishers' contemporary disconnect from NGOs and from movements of local, national or international scale at the same time as their political tactics expanded into a range of legal and extra-legal practices appeared to be the product of restrictive legislation, revealing how the coastal communities were pushed to operate in ways and through organizations that were politically less visible.

In retrospect, the difficulty I had assuming a culturally acceptable role within the patronage networks in the context of political struggle cast light on how Tabascans sought protection. I saw that there were differences in how fishers sought guidance on social and political issues and economic opportunities from fisher leaders. Some fishers belonging to Álvaro's federation invested in patronage relations with him alone, while others dealt more flexibly with various 'competing' patrons. These relations between fishers and their leaders corresponded to some degree with the fisher leaders' relations with state actors: some leaders were 'loyal' to politicians and government people that belonged to one particular party whereas many others either kept changing their political affiliation or tried to network with people from various parties at the same time, a tactic which made some leaders earn the nickname *cameleón*. This search for protection from multiple sources becomes understandable in the wider framework of the Mexicans' disillusionment with the PRI since its final years of unbroken rule in the 1990s, and how it has led people to turn from earlier social networks to the search for 'any patrons who might offer a helping hand' (Gledhill 2002: 54).

Correspondingly, my attention was also on how patrons displayed a variable degree of care and protection towards their protégées. Fisher leaders and fishing entrepreneurs worked either with fishers who belonged to their cooperative or employed unlicensed fishers who were practically dependent on them for access to a fishing license. Many of the patrons kept the fishers up-to-date about the operations of the government and the oil industry, and sought to assist the fishers to get the best out of various support programmes offered. However, labour relations between the license-holding entrepreneurs and unlicensed

fishers often involved debt, which kept many fishers bound to their patrons. Furthermore, curiously, although the reparations granted by the oil industry formally involved only licensed fishers, some license-holders distributed some of the gasoline they received from Pemex to 'their' unlicensed fishers, thereby gaining some leverage over them. Generally speaking, however, the strict division between formal and informal fishers—accentuated by the discontinuation of granting new fishing licenses and related acts of political and economic exclusion—essentially highlighted the power differentials and related frictions among the fisher folk.

ACCESS AND UNDERSTANDING

Having gained distance from the intimacy of the Vázquez family and our mutual attempts to fit each other into certain categories, it was easier for me to show Álvaro that he had no reason to be concerned about my intentions. Ten weeks into fieldwork, having obtained access to other leaders of Álvaro's faction, they allowed me to attend their meetings. This was a major breakthrough in my work. The leaders let me follow them a few times when they met among themselves, with their constituent fishers, and with oil industry and state actors. When I hesitantly discussed my upcoming participation with Álvaro, who was also going to be present, he said that I could of course go: 'I have nothing to hide,' he told me, although visibly uncomfortable.

One of the meetings was a forum where the content of Tabasco's upcoming law on aquaculture and fishing was discussed. Before the forum, Álvaro and a group of leaders involved me in a meeting where we went through the proposed legislative text and thought of ways to improve it from the fishers' perspective. Participating in reviewing the text and in following the event itself was one of my few chances to show Álvaro how serious I was about my work of trying to understand the fishers' situation. While it seemed to me that he noticed my efforts, it was during our drive to the very same forum on legislation that he told me not to ask him 'any more questions' (the essay's opening quote), reminding me that the barrier between us actually depended on much more than my enthusiasm and trustworthiness. Likewise, in the political meetings that I finally attended towards the end of fieldwork, faithful to his caution Álvaro remained quiet, withdrawing into the background of the discussions. No attempts by me to reassure Álvaro about my interests could have broken the wall of silence.

Having gained access to these meetings, I realized that if I had stayed within Álvaro's close circles it would never have happened. Álvaro seemed more concerned about my activities than some of the others, perhaps because he did not trust my intentions as a *gringa*, or perhaps because the oil industry had pressured him to monitor my fieldwork. This is something I will never know for sure. In retrospect, it is apparent that my attempts to categorize Álvaro reflected not only how I had learned to think but also reflected my place within the structures of incentives where writing about 'resistance' is rewarded. By the same token, Álvaro's operations as a mediator revealed the context of power and incentives within which he was located, which were strictly delimited. Within the conflict over space, it was difficult for the fisher leaders to network with other actors such as *campesinos* or oil industry workers as they had before, because securing offshore access was not in anybody else's interests. Fishing was also becoming less tempting with the wave of urbanisation among young adults. Furthermore, the fisher leaders could not defend

the unlicensed fishers' formalization because it threatened their licensed constituents' agendas.

However, the analytical move of placing the fieldwork encounter in its historical and political-economic context led me to appreciate the continued popular resonance among Tabascans of the idea of post-revolutionary Mexico's oil as patrimony and wealth to be shared. The fisher leaders were in an easier position to demand access to compensations from *la paraestatal* than to completely oppose its operations, despite the fact that they considered the Gulf of Mexico waters their territory. Moreover, in the situation where fishing was largely criminalized and opposition to the oil industry had recently been violently repressed, fishers operated beyond formal political arenas. At a time prior to *la Reforma Energética* and the opening of the shares from oil extraction to foreign, private companies, Álvaro's mediatory tactics reflected the power that ideas of people's oil continued to have in Mexico at the same time as they reflected his knowledge of law, politics and multiple ways of evading control to defend access to the sea (Scott 1985).

CONCLUSION

Time shifts the perspectives we gain through ethnographic reflexivity, though the process never reaches a final epiphany. Furthermore, the reflection seldom involves space for the interlocutors' post-fieldwork thoughts, thereby underlining the ethnographer's ownership of the text (Kondo 1986). I returned to Tabasco for three more months in 2012, but this time I mostly lived in the state capital, Villahermosa, and with unlicensed fishers at the coast. I visited the Vázquez family early on during the second trip to find that the tensions between us had dissipated and in their place was reserved warmth. Yet, sitting in the living room with Álvaro, going through an analysis of the politics of resource access that I had written for him to assess, I realized that while I no longer needed to ponder whether he was fish or fowl, the question of my identity was perhaps still unresolved for him.

In this essay, drawing on reflexive analysis of my relations with the Vázquez family, I have examined how my insights about the politics of fisheries and oil have developed in tandem with my place within the family (Kondo 1986; Landes 1986). That place, and the dynamics of the research encounter were shaped at the intersection of my own background, Álvaro and his family's expectations towards me, and the temporal and political economic context of the resource conflict among fishers and the oil industry. The resource frontier, in which during fieldwork in 2011–2012 the operators were the Mexican parastatal company and its foreign subcontractors, was becoming a territory where privatization was increasingly linked to Mexico's elites' strategies to re-impose state authority (Gledhill 2015; Watts 2012).

In showing the fundamentally inter-subjective and personal character of knowledge production, I have wanted to draw attention to how knowledge about conflicts is often born through fragile relationships, of trial and error in the context of secrecy and silence, and as something that happens *through* the subjective experience and creation by the ethnographer. The interactions through which the knowledge is produced involve more often than not a confused ethnographer and a defensive interlocutor, situated within asymmetrical relations of power. As several ethnographers (Coleman 2009; Collins and Gallinat 2010) have shown, fieldwork and the involved power games between the ethnographer and the interlocutor do not take place in an emotional vacuum, and as Malkki (2007: 173–174) writes,

'the participant observer is not a fly,' an invisible observer, but an active, albeit often controversial participant in the lives of interlocutors. Here I have tried to show how my expectations of Álvaro, my ambiguous roles in the family and Álvaro's careful techniques of instructing me were decisive for my learning to see how fisher leaders made sense of the rationalities of power in Tabasco.

That I could not accept Álvaro's authoritative guidance of fieldwork, which ran against my culturally-bound identity as a woman and a researcher, my expectations of a 'good' subaltern leader, and showed my related difficulty in operating within patronage networks and the various spheres of resource politics, brought me to analyze the tensions between us and how they shaped my perspective. My fixation on political division among the fishers, however, produced at first a such a sense of failure that I had to ask myself whether I would have been able to see 'resistance', had I wanted to, or had I been someone else, or had my entry to politics been through other people. This highlighted for me that ethnographers should more carefully examine where the need to categorize and judge comes from, and how and how much it blocks us from seeing.

As I have shown in this essay, the ways in which the fishers' leadership reasoned about power and networked with other actors to defend what they considered to be their right as fishers to space and livelihoods, reflected popular narratives about the people's oil, long-term experience of authoritarian Mexico and its political legacy since 2000, and disillusionment with the PRI of the 1990s and the neoliberal policies enforced recently by both PRI and PAN. Analyzing my relationship with Álvaro, however, underscored my difficulty in capturing in thought and words the leader that Álvaro embodied without exaggerating or downplaying the structure of power (Anand 2011; Madhok 2013) where he operated or veiling the contradiction between the fishers' leadership's official objectives and the amendments they made in order to remain the fishers' representatives. In examining a significant part of my fieldwork in Tabasco by exercising reflexivity, I have wanted to draw attention to ethnography's importance in showing the complexity and situatedness of politics of resource access.

Introducing me to cooperative fishers at the beginning of fieldwork, Álvaro once asked me how they would know where the information they gave me would end up. *'Si te doy mis secretos…,'* he began (if I give you my secrets). I stopped to search for words to tell that my intention was to give 'as objective a perspective' as possible about the fishers, but he, for good reason, hurried to correct me: 'as trustworthy a perspective as possible'. At that moment, more than I, it was he who spoke the language of ethnography. In the end, Álvaro did not trust his secrets about political mediatorship to me, but instead made me examine why I had thought it possible in the first place.

NOTES

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2 All names of people in this article are pseudonyms.
3 Petróleos Mexicanos was privatized in 2014.
4 These estimates are from an interview with a fishing official in 2011 and official statistics from 2009 (INEGI, 2010).
5 This is based on Saury Arias' (2010: 111) estimates of the number of fishers in Frontera, one of Tabasco's three coastal fishing towns.
6 While my interpretations of Álvaro's opinions are speculative, surmise about my possible links with the U.S. was expressed more explicitly to me by a government official who suspected that I was tracking fishers involved in the smuggling of drugs to the U.S.
7 Pseudonym for a subcontractor company which was carrying out geophysical studies along Tabasco's coast.

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Photo 7.1. Cleaning the previous night's catch of cintilla